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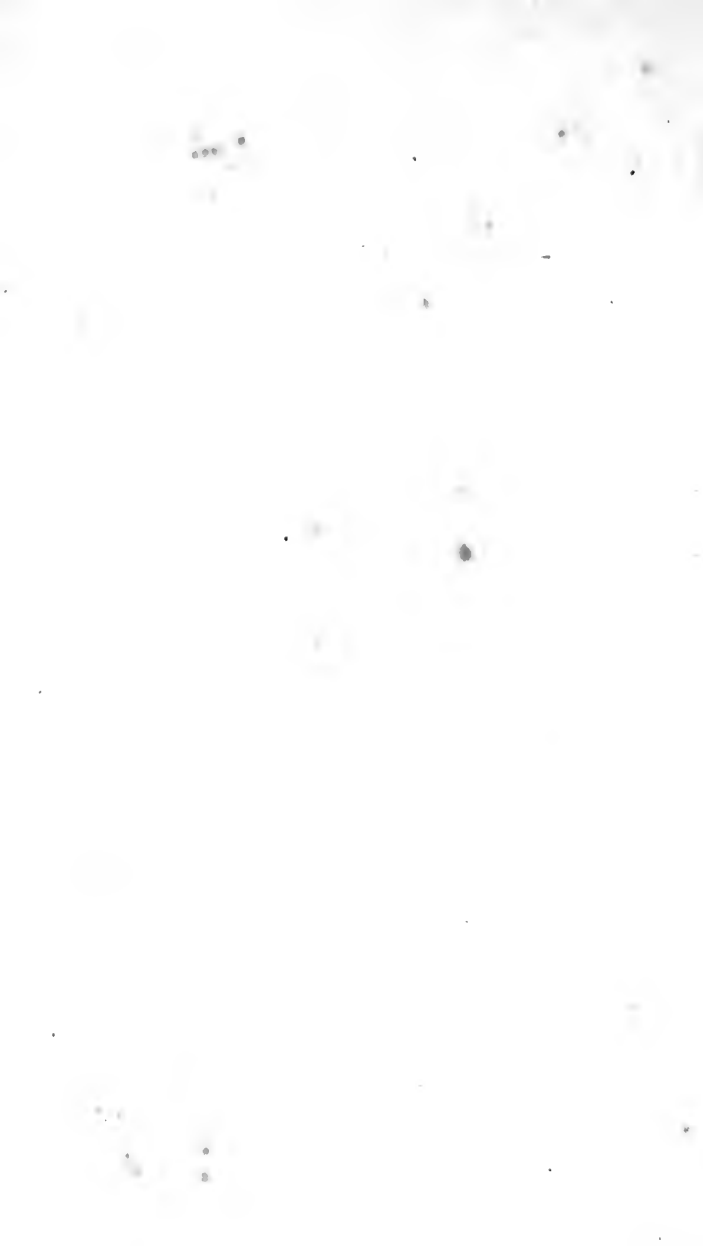
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HOME, SWEET HOME.



HOME, SWEET HOME.

A NOVEL.

BY

MRS. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF

“GEORGE GEITH,” “TOO MUCH ALONE,” “THE EARL’S PROMISE,”
ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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HOME, SWEET HOME.

CHAPTER I.

MY DÉBUT.

THAT night Gretchen and I sat with our two heads bent over one book : Dod's "Peerage, Baronetage, and Knightage of Great Britain and Ireland." The "titled classes" were a new study for us ; but Herr Droigel, in his business capacity, had occasionally to post himself up as regarded "who was who," and always kept a volume by him sacred to the nobility, in addition to one containing records of the landed gentry.

For the time being Gretchen's and my "who" resolved himself into Sir Thomas Brooks ; and from Dod we elicited the in-

formation that "Sir Brooks," the fourth baronet, had been born some fifty years previously ; that he married — "first, daughter of Michael Mowbray, Esq., of Hopedene, Northumberland (she died 1829) ; and second, Lady Muriel Marguerite, third daughter of the tenth Earl of Fortfergus. Residences : Park Lane, London ; Hopedene, Northumberland ; and the Retreat, Fairport. Heir presumptive : his brother, Henry Algernon, born at Richmond." Gretchen read that last sentence ; I did not. I saw—with my mind's eye—only the town twenty miles from Lovedale, where the waves lapped in on the sands, and the bay lay calm and unruffled, reflecting back the moonlight.

Half an hour's walk from my uncle's house brought one to the Retreat. I had known the place all my life as belonging to a vague Sir Thomas, who visited at the Great House, and who was a great power in the county.

“Evidently,” said Gretchen, interrupting my reverie, “the first wife brought the money, and his second wife is helping Sir Thomas Brooks, fourth baronet, to spend it.”

The amount of knowledge of the world possessed by some persons by no means gifted in other respects seems to me marvellous now, and it seemed naturally more marvellous to me then.

“Do you think I shall have to sing?” I inquired, all in a tremor.

“No,” Gretchen replied, coolly, “I should not think so. I imagine you are asked solely for the pleasure of your society, and because your uncle keeps a chemist’s shop at Fairport.”

“You talk nonsense,” I said sharply.

“And you talk like a baby,” she answered. “If you are not wanted to sing, why in the world do you suppose these people should ask you at all? In fact, I am sure they never did ask you: they told somebody to bring a certain

number of musical people, and that somebody has doubtless applied to papa for assistance. Sing?—of course you will have to sing; and I for one am glad of it.”

And was I? Yes, on the whole I think so. Stronger even than my natural timidity was the desire to know what I could do, what others would say when they heard Herr Droigel’s pupil; heard the result of weeks, months, years of practice; and yet the whole thing seemed to me unreal.

That the time was close at hand when I, Annie Trenet, should be led on to a platform, and curtsey to an applauding audience, and sing “my little song,” and prove a success or a failure, appeared like a dream.

Still, if I were ever to sing in public, I knew it was time I began. I had been on Herr Droigel’s hands long enough. All he could teach me, all I was capable of learning, had been taught and learnt; the days were now being spent uselessly. Even if I wished to put off the final plunge, I felt

it would be neither politic nor just to do so.

It was only to take one step, and then—I would be brave and take that one step. So I decided before going to sleep.

But as time went on my courage sank below zero. Spite of all the efforts he made to conceal it, Herr Droigel could not completely hide the anxiety he felt.

He did not say anything to me on the subject nearest his heart, but I could not fail to see the importance he attached to the impression my first appearance might cause. He did not tell me to practise any particular song, he never bade me take care of catching cold, or warn me to play no tricks with my voice, as had been the case formerly, but I found his eyes often fixed upon me. He failed to find pleasure in his favourite dishes; he talked little, and walked up and down the garden and through every room in the house a good deal, and he interested himself about my

dress to an extent which would at any other time have caused Gretchen and myself to shriek with laughter.

As matters stood, we all, however, felt a serious crisis was at hand, and were disposed to treat even apparent trifles in a serious and becoming manner.

“Though I am not in the least degree doubtful of the result,” said Gretchen, “it is impossible not to feel a little anxious about your *début*. It means riches or poverty for all of us.”

“Is there no medium,” I asked, “no middle path between the two?”

“I think not,” she replied; “it is not a question of power, but of courage. You can sing, we know; it only remains to be seen whether you will do so before an audience.”

“Trust me, Gretchen,” I answered. “I will try to be brave.”

As a rule, Herr Droigel, so long as our demands on his purse were not too frequent

or too heavy, allowed us to dress as we pleased without hindrance or comment.

If sometimes Gretchen or I, in the vanity of our hearts, exhibited to him a new bonnet or mantle, or asked if he did not think the colour of a dress lovely ; he was wont to say : “ Ah, my dears, youth is beautiful in anything. Everything is becoming to the young.” But now all seemed changed.

Over my attire for Sir Brooks’ party he fidgeted himself and me to an extent which was simply incomprehensible.

He accompanied me to a modiste, with whom there had evidently been confidences exchanged previously.

“ Is this the young lady ? ” she said, in broken English ; and on being assured that I was, she stood back to survey me critically, as Worth might now.

“ Mon Dieu, but you had reason,” she went on, after a pause. “ It shall be just as you made suggestion. The coiffure——”

“Shall be in keeping, rest assured,” finished Herr Droigel with a satisfied smile, and then he left me with Madame, who treated me as she might a lay figure she had been instructed to dress to the best advantage.

“What colour is it to be?” I asked innocently, thinking there could be no guilt in inquiring what I was to wear, but Madame flung up her hands and turned up her eyes at the question.

I must wait, I should see. If my good guardian had not spoken, were not her lips sealed? His taste was perfect, so was his judgment. I should be dressed *à ravir*.

So far as I was concerned, I did not see much to ravish my eyes when the dress did come home. It lay spread out on the bed when I ascended the stairs after tea, and a young lady sent by Madame the modiste mounted guard over it.

What had I not pictured to myself as the dress I should like to wear! White

looped up with roses, or flowers of the blue convolvulus, blue wreathed with clematis ; pink trimmed with soft lace. What a blessing it is young people are not always free agents, and consequently cannot bedizen themselves after the desire of their hearts !

And the dress I beheld ? you ask. It was black, of a filmy, gauzy material ; a poor thing, I thought, though it cost a great deal of money, and produced a considerable effect ; with a white tracery running through it, with a soft floating effect disappointing to me.

I should have liked a gown stiff as brocade, grand as velvet, and there—well, there it lay, and I had to make the best of it.

That morning a hairdresser had come to curl my hair, and I had, in obedience to Herr Droigel, been running about in the air all day to uncurl it.

He wanted it to fall in “heavy lumps,”

he explained. Those were the days in which women had hair in plenty of their own, and mine was exceptionally thick and long—so long, that even in curls it fell almost to my waist, and we had to put it out of the way as best we could while the important question of robing proceeded.

As for the assistant, she was in ecstasies ; for me, I was disgusted. I looked in the glass and beheld a pale face and dark hair, a black dress against a white skin, and nothing to relieve or soften either.

Had I been going to a funeral, I could not have assumed a more sombre guise.

A coral necklace might have brightened up my appearance, but even that was denied me. A double row of jet beads was clasped round my throat, and thus ornamented the young person pronounced me “perfect.”

“Let Monsieur see,” she suggested ; and Monsieur having seen and been satisfied, I was hurried into a brougham duly hired

for the occasion, and consequently called ours; and we drove off amidst an almost unintelligible series of utterances from Madame Droigel, and smiles and kissing of hands from Gretchen, who farther prospered our undertaking by throwing an old shoe after our vehicle as it emerged from the gate.

The die was cast, the step taken. During the drive, which seemed to me to occupy hours, Herr Droigel talked laboriously—I use the word advisedly—till, utterly worn out with the flow of unmeaning sentences and the unwonted movement of the carriage, I told him I could listen no longer—that I was getting such a headache I should not be able to sing a note.

“Sing!” he repeated; “who said anything about your singing?”

“Ah, Herr Droigel,” I replied, “we should never—that is, I should never—have been asked by Sir Brooks (Gretchen

and I had fallen into this form of expression) “for the mere pleasure of my society.”

“And what knowest thou, Annie, of Sir Brooks, or any other Sir, to warrant such an assertion?”

“I know nothing of him,” I replied, “but I do know something of his friends; and they—the Wiffordes at all events—would as soon think of inviting their coachman to dinner as of asking me to spend an evening with them.”

“Soh, soh; then the Ladies Wifforde, your Great-House heiresses, are acquainted with our baronet; what you call hand-and-glove?”

“I cannot say anything about hand-and-glove, but they visit at the Retreat, Sir Thomas’s place near Fairport, and Sir Thomas—Sir Brooks—visits at the Great House.”

“That is odd—that is what we may call one coincidence,” remarked my companion.

“But it is the lady who asks, not the husband. She has, oh such heavenly impulses ; she loves music and musicians, paintings and painters, books and authors.”

“She must have a very large heart,” I observed.

“Don’t be satirical, Miss. Satire may be the correct thing at forty, but it is a mistake for a girl in her teens. No, as I was saying, the Lady Brooks is artistic herself, to the tips of her taper fingers. She gets up little operas, she has charming afternoons, she takes singers, such as Serlini for instance, to her bosom ; she can act herself in short charming pieces with a marvellous spirit. Poor Sir Brooks—well, he is Sir Brooks ; fat, heavy, English, beefish, phlegmatic, good-natured, with an adorable rent-roll, a rent-roll calculated to make all the world perceive his good qualities ; but Lady Brooks is the light of the household. You shall see her, you shall judge for yourself,” he added, as our modest

conveyance, following in the wake of a dashing carriage and pair which had just drawn off, stopped in front of a brilliantly-lighted house, which Herr Droigel informed me in an impressive whisper was the abode of Sir Brooks.

At that moment I think I lost my senses, and never perfectly recovered them again till I awoke, late the next day, in my own bed, in my own little room. I remember, as in a dream, the red carpet on which I stepped, the hall filled with brilliant flowers and servants no less gorgeous. I remember some one taking my cloak, and some one else, in a small back room, asking if I would have tea. Two or three people were there with whom Herr Droigel shook hands and chatted while he stirred his tea and sipped it, and swelled out his chest, and protruded an immense extent of shirt-frill, in which glistened a diamond brooch.

My master looked magnificent that evening. Any one might have taken him for

the prince or grand-duke of some German state a few acres square—he was at once so dignified and so condescending—so affable, and yet so stately.

Looking at him, I felt inclined to rub my eyes and ask, could this be my Droigel or another? Could this be the person I habitually beheld clad in an old dressing-gown, with slippers down at heel, unshorn, unkempt, very frequently unwashed? Was this man—so grand in his presence, so kingly in his manner, so self-possessed, with such an air of society—the Droigel I had hitherto seen in the bosom of his family, concocting horrible *plats*, babbling with Madame, looking after the peccadilloes of successive servants, or shrieking out to me that one note was too flat or another too sharp, and the general effect of my singing enough to set “his teeth on edge?”

As for me, no one took the smallest notice of my existence, except that, when we passed from the small room into a large

apartment, at one end of which stood, in a sort of alcove, a grand piano, that bade fair to be rent to pieces by reason of the blows a fashionable pianist was dealing it, a lady glided up to Herr Droigel, and, pressing his hand, said—

“How good of you to come! how can I thank you sufficiently? And so you have brought your little girl. Quite right; it will amuse her.” And then, with a very fashionable smile, she passed on to give currency to some other conventional white lie.

It was Madame with the heavenly impulses. She was very fair; I saw that, spite of the state of semi-idiotcy to which I was reduced.

She spoke of me as a child; as if I were ten years of age, and had been brought there for a treat. Was she mad, or was I?

On most persons, I suppose, the first sight of a brilliant party produces an effect such as might be induced by a goblet of

sparkling wine given to one who had never previously tasted anything stronger than water.

For myself, I can honestly say, I was mentally intoxicated. When I walked, I seemed treading on air; when any one spoke and I answered, the voices sounded to me unreal; when I looked at the brilliantly-lighted rooms, at the beautiful ladies, at the gentlemen leaning over to catch their words, I felt I must be either in dream or in fairyland.

No transformation-scene was ever less real to me than the scene which greeted my eyes that night: the shifting colours, the changing faces, the scent of flowers and perfumes, the sound of music, the hum of voices.

Suddenly upon the assemblage there fell a hush; the hum of voices subsided; there was a pause, during which it seemed to me, still looking and feeling as in a dream, each guest held his or her breath. Up the

centre of the room a path was cleared, and then, led by Sir Brooks—the tips of her fingers resting on his arm—a lady moved slowly towards our end of the apartment.

Like a queen she inclined her head to those who gave her greeting ; like a queen she walked ; like a queen she wore a mask between her heart and the crowd who looked upon her face. Ah, Heaven ! how more and more dreamlike the scene grew when I beheld her—when I saw the sovereign to whom in the years gone by I had given my allegiance, Serlini—than whom there never was but one, than whom there can never be another !

She sang. I was not three yards distant. I could have caught the train of her sweeping dress by stretching out a hand. She sang. Why should I try to describe that which is historical ? She stirred the hearts of the young by indicating the feelings to come ; by some curious sympathy her tones evoked olden memories in the aged, by

touching strings no hands had strayed over for a quarter of a century ; at once she was all things to all men. She came simply and naturally, like the primroses of spring or the lilies of summer, and men and women rejoiced ; why, it might have puzzled them to explain, as it puzzles me now to record.

Why do those who have once heard the nightingale always remember that song with mingled feelings of pleasure and pain ? Wherefore do they recollect it to the end of life ?

Who shall say ? Who shall explain these things—why the trill of a bird, the tones of a voice, the rhythm of an air, linger in the memory—why, when the singer is dead and gone, that conjuror Time, who steals so much of our best and brightest from us, relents, and gives back, like an echo, note for note of the melody which charmed away our senses in the long ago ?

The song was sung, and she was gone — lost among the throng. Herr

Droigel played the accompaniment for her. I notice that fact now without wonder, though I noticed it then with a certain surprise. Yet I need not. His touch was so sympathetic, his power of expression so perfect — was ! — is, rather ! When next I go to town, shall I not probably hear Droigel accompany yet another prima donna, the favourite of the season ? Over Serlini, the favourite of all time, he and I bemoan ourselves.

Of that evening I have, as has been said, only a vague confused recollection ; nothing seems to stand out clear and distinct in my memory. I saw as through a mist ; I heard as in a fog. Faces mixed themselves up before me ; voices and utterances produced no clear impression on my mind. I am no equestrian ; good society and I formed acquaintance too late for me to acquire the thoughts, habits, or accomplishments of those who are to the manner born ; but I have always in my own imagination

fancied that a man, galloping across country as hard as his horse can take him, must feel as I felt that night at Sir Brooks'; where object succeeded to object, and sound to sound, and face followed face, with the same rapidity as hedge and field, and copse and stream and fence, must pass before the eyes of a fearless rider.

I was not fearless. I was apparently brave and self-possessed, because I had almost lost the power of feeling anything. I looked, answered, listened, like one in a dream. I heard singing; I heard long fantasias executed; I saw musical gymnastics performed on a much-enduring piano, by long-haired foreigners with supple fingers and lean muscular wrists.

Young ladies sang, and so did old, for the matter of that. There were quartettes and trios and duets; and then a man with a dark complexion and black hair, and a hooked nose, and very white teeth, and a wonderful display of jewelry, said to me,

“Now, Miss ;” which meant that my turn was come.

Then for a moment I seemed to awaken and shrink ; but the dark man led me to the piano, where Herr Droigel sat, and putting a roll of music into my hand, left me to my fate.

I heard murmurs of “Who is she?” “What is she?” to which a gentleman, with a glass stuck in his eye, answered, “It is Droigel’s baby. Hush !”

The prelude began, and my future was to make or to mar. I thought then, and have often thought since, that had the choice been given me, I should a thousand times rather have preferred singing that first song before a great audience ; an audience that would have clapped and encouraged me, and given me a sufficient fillip to enable the opening notes to be uttered with courage and distinctness.

As it was, my voice trembled, its tones were uncertain ; then Herr Droigel played

a little louder, and flung upon me a look of anguish. Had he seemed angry I must have broken down altogether. As it was, I remembered all that depended upon my success ; how much happiness, how much misery—in a word, how much or how little money, and strung myself up to the execution of my task as a rider might to take some tremendous leap. There was no more timidity, no more unsteadiness ; I never looked at my music or at the company ; I kept my eyes fastened on the wall at the extreme end of the apartment, and I sang. How I sang I knew by the storm of applause which followed, by the touch of Herr Droigel's great hand softly clapping my shoulder, by the tears of thankfulness I saw in his eyes.

“God bless you, Annie!” he whispered. “Now you shall sing Mozart for them, and nothing more to-night—no, not another note.”

Wise was Droigel in all his ways ; he

led me off while Sir Brooks' guests were still willing to hear me again. To Lady Muriel I heard him murmur, "It is her first trial, and she is young and shy." And then we were in the small room, almost empty now, and some one brought wine and wished me to take it; but I put the glass aside and asked for water.

My lips were dry and my throat parched, and my cheeks burning; but I was happy, oh, *how happy* I felt, no words could tell.

At that moment Madame Serlini came in, leaning on the arm of a gentleman whose face I should have recognised had I looked at him, instead of being absorbed in contemplating her.

She spoke to my master as she passed him, and then addressed me.

I stood up as she did so. I let my hand lie passively in hers while she said in her soft foreign accents—

"I hear you and I are old acquaint-

tances—that we met ever so long ago at Fairport.”

“I have never forgotten you, Madame,” I managed to say.

“How strange! and I have never forgotten the little girl whose face was so wonderful a study. You did not come to hear me again, though.”

“I had to go home,” I explained.

“Where my cousin and I once paid you a visit,” added Madame Serlini’s companion.

“Oh, Mr. Sylvester!” I cried out in my astonishment at meeting him; and then he said Miss Cleaves had been talking about me quite lately, that he knew I was studying under Herr Droigel, and that he congratulated me upon my success.

There was a little stiffness and reserve about his manner which seemed only natural in the address of any one connected with the Great House, but it made

me feel nervous and uncomfortable nevertheless.

“Is Miss Cleeves——” I was beginning to inquire, when I saw a swift change pass over Madame Serlini’s face; and in the same instant I heard the gentleman who had spoken of me as a baby say to Herr Droigel—

“So we know now the reason of your sudden affection for the country, and flight from town. You wanted to bring the violet to perfection, and a remarkably sweet flower it is, doing credit to your selection and your culture. You agree with me?” he asked, addressing Madame Serlini. “It will be the young lady’s own fault if she fail to climb to a great height.”

“Miss Trenet has a charming voice,” she answered, in cold measured tones. “Herr Droigel, can I set you down anywhere? No; then will you have the kindness to take me to my carriage? Mr. Sylvester Birwood, I give our young friend

into your charge." And so, with a slight inclination, she would have passed the newcomer, but he stepped before her.

"You will have some supper, will you not?" he asked.

"I never sup," she replied.

"But Miss Trenet——"

"Has sung her appetite away, or I am much mistaken," was the answer.

"Lady Muriel commissioned me——"

"I have already made my adieux," said Madame Serlini.

"And our charming hostess, so sympathetic and full of comprehension, permits the absence of Droigel and his child-singer," added the Professor, in an access of unsophisticated artlessness.

With a sneer, a bow, and a shrug, the gentleman drew back disappointed.

"Good-night, Miss Trenet," he said; "you have my heartfelt wishes for your success." And then I found myself walking beside Mr. Birwood, whose surname I

had just heard for the first time, with the tips of my fingers touching the sleeve of his coat, wondering all the while whether, if Miss Wifforde knew, she would feel very angry at the idea of her nephew taking even so much charge of me as this implied.

I do not think she would have disapproved of the extent of our conversation.

“Do you remember telling me you never intended making any use of your voice?” he asked, as we crossed the hall.

“Yes,” I answered; “there was a time when I made up my mind never to sing before any one.”

“But you changed your purpose?”

“More correctly, perhaps, it was changed for me,” I replied. “I had scarcely a choice in the matter.”

“But still I presume you became Herr Droigel’s pupil of your own free will.”

“My uncle would never have wished me to become a singer against my will.”

“And you think you shall like the life?”

“Oh, yes ; I am sure I shall—greatly.”

“You sing very, very beautifully,” he remarked.

“Thank you,” I answered with gratitude.

“Come, Annie,” exclaimed Herr Droigel at this point in the conversation ; “do not stand in the draught, child. I told our driver to wait at the corner of the street for us. There is Madame Serlini waving her fan to you ;” and he performed a series of frantic gesticulations after her carriage.

“Good-bye,” I said to Mr. Sylvester. I did not know whether to offer him my hand or not ; but he settled the question by taking it.

“I shall tell my cousin of your success,” he remarked ; “she will be delighted to hear of our having met.”

“Ah, that adorable Miss Cleeves !” cried out Herr Droigel. Madame Serlini had

evidently given him every information concerning Mr. Sylvester. "Would you carry to her the profound homage of her humblest admirer?" Mr. Birwood, smiling, said he would; and so we parted. The night of trial was over; the first step taken; the plunge made; and on all sides I heard but one opinion.

I had made a success.





CHAPTER II.

LIKE A MAN'S HAND.

SUCCESS never seems so real a fact as failure, wealth as poverty, pleasure as pain.

It is hard to say why this should be the case ; but the experience of most persons will, I apprehend, confirm the truth of my observation.

We climb by almost imperceptible steps to the attainment of our wishes ; but if we fall when nearly touching the summit of success, we have the long, long way we travelled upward to descend before we even commence our weary explorations of the abysses of despair.

There is nothing intangible about disappointment ; there is nothing dreamlike to

the man who, having striven, has yet gained no prize. But there is something indefinite in success.

Sweets do not linger on the palate like bitters; joy lacks the realism of sorrow. Happy as I felt that night, I vaguely understood I was not one half so radiant over my success as I should have been despondent in the event of failure.

I grew weary of Herr Droigel's ecstasies; the compliments he repeated clogged my ears. The night and the pure fresh air seemed more grateful than the brilliantly-lighted rooms, filled with rank and beauty, where a hundred perfumes mixed and floated through the the air. Spite of my companion's remonstrances, I let down the window, and putting out my head, allowed the cool breeze to fan my temples. Love-dale and its sweet peace came back to my memory. I could hear the bees humming, and smell the beds of thyme; I was wan-

dering through the pine-woods, I was listening to the stream.

So perhaps to a great statesman, author, general, or preacher, there may come in the very moment of fulfilment the remembrance of some humble home, of beloved schoolfellows, of days, peaceful happy days, that can return no more ; of the dead, long sleeping quietly, who once made earth blessed with their presence.

“ You are overwrought, my Annie,” said Herr Droigel at length, drawing me gently back and pulling up the window. “ You have eat not, you have drank not. Bah ! who ever eats or drinks at Sir Brooks’, where there is nothing to be had but iced water or water ices ? How splendid was the coolness of Serlini ! ‘ I never sup,’ she said ; and she is right. It is to a banquet she sits down when she returns to her own house—a banquet where there is everything out of season, and flowers which blossom not save at a tropical heat.”

“Who was that gentleman to whom she was so barely civil?” I inquired.

“He is the Honourable Florence,” answered Herr Droigel, as usual dropping the intermediate Christian name as of no account; “a man about town; a man who has been about town all his life. Proper people do not incline to his society. I know not myself that there is much harm in him. He married a rich old lady, who did not die soon enough for his pleasure; but she is dead now, so we will let that scandal lie. He is a man wonderfully devoted to music and to everything beautiful; a man dangerous to offend, but who sometimes proves a useful friend. Ah, here we are at the modest home once more. Hush, not a word; I will make-believe you have effected a fiasco.” And he preceded me through the open door which Gretchen held wide for our entrance.

“What is the matter?” she asked, looking into her father’s face, over which he

had composed an expression of profound dejection; then, glancing past him at me, and seeing the smiles I could not conceal, she cried out, "Oh, you darling! all has gone well, then!" and caught me in a close embrace.

Till that night I never exactly comprehended what my failure would have meant to the family of which I had become one.

I had known a great deal of their future happiness or anxiety hung on the issue; but after all, happiness and anxiety are mere figures of speech until one beholds them utterly bared of conventional clothing.

Little as I understood of the world, I had seen enough to feel sure from the rejoicing over my successful *début*, that failure and beggary would have been almost synonymous terms. Herr Droigel had staked a great deal on me, and won. It is not every day a speculation of this

sort, or indeed of any sort, turns out well, and he was jubilant accordingly.

Long as I have known the Professor, intimate as my acquaintance had been and is with him, I have not to this hour an idea of the creed to which Herr Droigel subscribes ; of the nature of the religion he “shrines in his soul ;” of the name or names of the god or gods his “natural reason worships.”

All I can say is, the creed is as far from being apostolic as Athanasian ; the religion of a kind which must have been revealed to himself alone, and his fetish a creation entirely of his own imagination.

However, let the idol he had evolved out of his metaphysical researches, and deduced from long observation of nature and mankind, be what it would, he evidently entertained some feeling of religious gratitude for my success.

He did not seem to care to talk much about the “good fortunes of this so dear

Annie," but left inquiry and comment to his wife and daughter.

"You must not babble to me," he said in reply to a torrent of questions that poured from Gretchen. "I want to feel thankful and eat my supper without being disturbed by words lighter than thistle-down. And let that weary child have some peace. Is it not enough she has vindicated my judgment and made her mark, but you must ask her to tell you this and tell you that, when her poor head is still spinning round like a top?"

"It is your dear old head that is spinning," Gretchen retorted, patting the head so referred to with affectionate approval. "You are thinking what lovely present you can make Annie; you are considering, 'I wonder whether my Gretchen's heart would be glad at the sight of a shot-silk dress, changeable as the colours on a dove's breast;' you are full of benevolent projects——"

“I am full of projects,” he interrupted, “which I must see carried out before I can be benevolent. We have made the first step well, but there is a long road to travel before we can touch our goal. Annie’s notes are good, but we must see about cashing them. Ah, this money, this money! Annie,” he broke off, “you look white as a ghost. For the love of me, of Droigel, taste that wine, in a draught of which I drink to you, best and most docile of pupils. Too tired to eat? Then you had better get to bed and to sleep. No, Gretchen, stay here, and let her alone for this night; she wants rest; it has been too much for the country-bred maiden.”

He was right, it had been almost too much for me. When I got upstairs my head seemed spinning as he had said; my limbs felt weary, my hands numb.

I sat down beside the dressing-table, feeling wearied and languid, but oh so

thankful, so content. Like a dream, my past life lay stretched behind ; like a vision of fairyland the future unrolled its possibilities to my imagination.

I could not rest till I had told uncle Isaac of the success already achieved ; and late though it was, I wrote him a long letter, which I was in the act of finishing, when through the silence there came a crash as if every pane of glass in the conservatory had been broken, a crash followed by a second and yet a third.

Before that came, however, I was on my way downstairs.

"Something dreadful must have happened in the garden," I exclaimed ; "I think the greenhouse has fallen."

"I think not," Herr Droigel answered deliberately. "I believe it is only that my salad is now well mixed."

Saying which he lighted a lantern and took a stick, and sallied out in the direction of the garden ; Gretchen and I, spite of

Madame's remonstrances, following at a respectful distance.

We could hear his measured footsteps crunching over the gravel, and we could hear besides something not measured—groans and curses combined in inextricable confusion.

“It is Hayles,” whispered Gretchen ;
“take my word, he came to steal the vegetables, and has hurt himself.”

It certainly looked as if he had, when Mr. Hayles came into the hall, escorted by Herr Droigel.

His hands and face were much cut, he was bleeding from a variety of wounds, he was trembling like an aspen.

“If you had only told me you were coming,” said the Professor, politely, “I would have had things better prepared for you. Can I offer you warm water and strapping-plaster?”

“Are you going to send for the police?” asked Mr. Hayles, with desperation.

“No, my friend, I am not going to send for the police. My time is of value—time to me is money, as says the proverb of your country. You are free to go. Next time you want any vegetables, it will afford me great pleasure to send them to you, if you will only let me know where they are to be delivered. Stay, you had better have *un petit verre*. Thank you, Annie,” he added, for at his words I ran and poured out some brandy and gave it to Herr Droigel, who in turn handed it to the sufferer. “That will set you up. Be careful how you go out. Good-night.” And he held the lantern high, so as to light the short drive and the gate towards which his victim limped.

Arrived there, Mr. Hayles, rendered courageous perhaps by the brandy he had swallowed, lifted up his voice and uttered a Communion Service against the members of our household.

His language was of that description

Londoners are privileged to hear any day, at any hour, in almost any part of the metropolis. He held forth not without some needless repetitions in the vernacular of his class, and as he banged the gate, fired his parting shot into our camp.

“It was a d—d trick,” he shouted ; “and nobody but an infernal foreigner would have thought of baiting such a trap.”

It was impossible to admire either Mr. Hayles’ morals or his manner of expressing his feelings ; but I could not altogether dissent from his opinions.

To invert an old adage, however, one man’s poison is another’s meat ; and Herr Droigel thought he had done an exceedingly clever thing in circumventing his enemy.

When it came to a pitched battle between me and the Professor, he did not come off with colours flying so triumphantly. We signed a truce, which we shall never

break now, I imagine, unless the pious William and Prince Bismarck decide to invade England, in which case Droigel might bethink himself of a house containing a few articles worth looting—of a singer who, if compelled to reappear, might, by the magic of old associations and former prestige, be valuable to an agent once again. If he reads this sentence, we shall laugh together over it, and love each other none the less and none the more.

The day after my first success, he and I were friends “to perfection.” Of all people in the world, who should drive out to our country retreat but Madame Serlini!

How good she was, how kind! She came accompanied by a gentleman, who had, I subsequently learnt, much to do with the giving of concerts and the engaging of singers. He wanted me—me, Annie, to sing for him twelve times.

But already there was, to use an Irish

expression, "money bid for me." With sighs and groans Herr Droigel lamented his fate. Goldstein, he of the Hebrew cast of features, and the jewelry which hung about his person like golden manacles, had spoken concerning me, and though his offer was "low, much too low, still it was he who had arranged the invitation to Sir Brooks'; and besides, Droigel was under obligations to him; and no one could say, or should say, Droigel was ungrateful, or higgledy-piggledy like a huckster. No paper, it was true, had been signed; but then Droigel's word was as good as his bond."

"There needs no writings with me," he went on; "what I say, I do. Man or woman I defy to bring against me that most terrible of charges, 'he promises, and fulfils not.'"

"I wish every one could conscientiously make the same statement," remarked Madame Serlini's companion, politely. Evidently he had called merely to oblige

her. Even to me it was clear he did not believe to any extent in the talents of Herr Droigel's *rara avis*.

“It is bad, bad,” proceeded my master, “for people to undertake that they have no intention of fulfilling. A man makes an appointment; in his positive English he says, ‘I will be at such and such a place at two sharp.’ I am there five minutes before the time, so as to be more than punctual. At half an hour past two he is not there; behold, thirty-five precious minutes lost out of my life—dead lost,” repeated the Professor, mournfully. “Or one of the big music houses; the chief thereof remarks to me, ‘Droigel, I will make up your account, and send your cheque for the half-year.’ He makes not up the account; he sends no cheque, and I have to go twice, thrice, four times, before I can get even part of my money; and all those weeks there wait for their accounts the British tradesmen whom my soul

abhors, to whom I give no promises now, but that which their soul loves not, cash ; since across the counter is the antidote for cheating.”

During the time devoted by Herr Droigel to an enumeration of his virtues and a declamation against the vices of others, Madame Serlini had been carelessly turning over the leaves of a book which lay on the table, and looking occasionally first at him and then at Gretchen. Suddenly she said—

“Your daughter is older than Miss Trenet ; is it not so ?”

“Ach, but yes,” replied Herr Droigel, “only a few months, however. Gretchen is——”

“Do not tell me, let me guess,” interrupted our visitor. “Your daughter has lived twenty years.”

“And I also,” I stated.

“Perhaps,” she said, with a certain significance ; then added, “Droigel, why did

you dress your pupil last night to look like a 'baby,' as Mr. Florence called her?"

"Because I thought that goodly company might be lenient in proportion as they supposed her to be young," answered Herr Droigel, glibly. "Besides, Annie is years more juvenile than her age. We will put her voice aside—what is her appearance?"

"That of a girl in her first teens," said Madame. "Perhaps you were right; the younger probably you keep her for the present the better. If ever I can be of any service to you," she added, rising and holding out her hand, "command me. I shall follow your career with the keenest interest. Good-bye, Droigel; if any one can make her triumphantly successful, you are the person."

And so the interview ended, and our visitors were gone.

"Mein Gott, but that woman is rest-

less!" exclaimed the Professor. "She reposes never; she has the energy of ten thousand. Had I given you up to her friend, you would have been worked to death. You must have sung here to-day, and two hundred miles off to-morrow; and you would have had to put the work of seven years into one, and appeared, ill or well, tired or not tired. Ah, Madame, you are good, clever, amiable, generous to a fault; but you understand not the nature of such an English maiden as my Annie! Her heart beats quietly, while yours, ach, Himmel! throbs like a steam-engine at high pressure."

With which definition of our different constitutions, Herr Droigel left me to study a new song he had composed, "addressed especially," so he stated, "to touch the feelings and open the purse-strings of the British mother."

The words were simply idiotic, and the song as contemptible a composition as it

was possible for the Professor, with his consummate knowledge of music, to produce; but I can say from my own experience both answered the purpose he intended.

I never sang "The Mother's Farewell" in public without receiving a rapturous encore. "It brought down the parents, to quote Herr Droigel, who was wont to watch with a grim enjoyment the production of pocket-handkerchiefs by ladies, and the emotion evinced by heads of families generally. All this meant, I understood at a later period of my life, so many copies of the song purchased next day. I at first signed them by the five hundred, but eventually Herr Droigel had a stamp cut, and saved me that trouble.

All this happened in the early part of my career, while I was still innocent of the ways of the world, as Eve before she ate of the apple.

It was a happy life I led then. I had to

work hard and sing so often that I sometimes wondered whether Madame Serlini's energy could have exceeded that of Herr Droigel; but I liked the applause I gained, and was more than willing to study closely in order to win it. Farther, every wish was gratified, every whim indulged, all save one.

For some reason it was so managed that I never saw any one alone, never was permitted to go anywhere alone. Had I been less busy, I might have chafed more at this than was the case. As it happened, I did murmur occasionally at never being permitted to speak a word in private to Miss Cleaves, who came often to our house, sometimes accompanied by the Dacres, sometimes with Mr. Sylvester, sometimes by herself.

When I remonstrated, however, with Herr Droigel, he said—

“I have a sacred charge over you; I am to you mother, father, uncle, guardian,

friend—all in one. If harm came, how should I answer for it? Be tranquil, my child; the day must arrive when you will thank Droigel for regarding each man and each woman as a wolf in sheep's clothing. The way of a young girl who sings in public, is not easy to keep strewn with roses. I would guard the heartache from you. Trust that what I am doing is best for all of us."

"Guess where I intend going next week," said Miss Cleeves one morning when I chanced to be alone in the drawing-room of our old house in London, to which we had again removed. "You could never guess, so I will tell you. To Lovedale, to the old darlings. How I wish you could go with me; but of course, even if Herr Droigel permitted, the 'ladies' hair would stand straight up on end at the very idea.

"I will read you what they say. Good Herr Professor, you are just in time to hear the wise utterances of my kindred con-

cerning your pupil," she added, as my master, attired in dressing-gown and slippers, entered the apartment, apologizing for his déshabille. "Know all people, that this letter is from Laura, coheiress with her sister of the late Sylvester Wifforde Esquire ; and this is what she says : ' As to your remark concerning our ever having "despised" the young person to whom you refer, we are too much accustomed to your inaccurate modes of expression to attach any importance to the observation. We always considered Mrs. Motfield and her granddaughter highly respectable and well conducted ; and while it must ever be a matter of regret to hear of any female devoting herself to a career so full of peril as that of a public singer, and though we bitterly lament you can so far forego your own dignity as to associate with one in all respects, save that of modesty, your inferior, we are glad to hear she is able to earn a livelihood for herself ; and we trust she may be preserved

from temptation, and saved from bringing disgrace upon a family which, if humble, has always preserved its integrity.' Now, how am I to spend a month with such antiquated dowagers?" inquired Miss Cleeves, folding up the letter, and never pausing to inquire how her unnecessary frankness might have affected my feelings. "Nothing but the sternest sense of duty could induce me to revisit those scenes of my childhood."

"Are you likely to be at Fairport?" asked Herr Droigel.

"Not at all," answered Miss Cleeves, looking him straight in the face. "If I should, however, happen to visit that charming seaport, can I convey any message from you to the dear uncle Isaac of our friend Annie?"

"I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing him in London soon," Herr Droigel replied. "Naturally he wishes to embrace his niece, from whom he has been parted so long."

“This is news to you, I see Annie,” observed Miss Cleeves.

And indeed it was. I felt so bewildered, I could make no answer.





CHAPTER III.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

NOT all my questioning could elicit from Herr Droigel any information as to the period of my uncle's arrival ; which was not singular, considering that when he expressed his hope of seeing him soon in London, he had not written or despatched the letter of invitation.

Ere long however an answer arrived. It was inconvenient for him to leave home, so the writer stated. At the same time he could not resist the temptation held out. He would not, however, avail himself of Herr Droigel's proffered hospitality. Mrs. Motfield had never visited London, and he would take the opportunity of showing her and a couple of his young people the sights.

If Herr Droigel could look them out lodgings, he should take it as a favour.

At first Herr Droigel pooh-poohed this idea. Rather than that the uncle of his dear Annie, and the aunt and the beloved cousins, sought shelter in a strange house, he, Madame, and Gretchen should repose on the floor.

“But, bah!” he proceeded, “are there not rooms enough and to spare? If Annie will occupy the same chamber with Gretchen, and a bedstead be erected in the back drawing-room, could not success be achieved? Speak, best of wives!”

Thus adjured, Madame spoke.

All could be as he made suggestion. It would be bad for every one, if the house were deserted by Annie’s friends.

At this juncture I interposed.

“Excepting uncle Isaac, they are no friends of mine, Madame. It is very kind of you and Herr Droigel to wish to have them here, but I hope you will let them go.

into lodgings. So far as I am concerned, I have no desire for the same roof to cover me and Mrs. Isaac Motfield."

"But she is an aunt of thine," suggested Madame, in a tone of reproach.

"That is not my fault, though it may be my misfortune," I replied. "We have never been on good terms—we never shall be. If she comes here, we shall quarrel the whole time; for, if her children have grown up as they seemed to promise, they must be miracles of ill-breeding."

"Didst thou ever hear, Droigel, such words as these?" began Madame, whom I had roused on her weak point. A large circle of relatives was her idea of perfect happiness. In her own family there were perpetually recurring birth or marriage days; and on New-year's eve we were wont either to receive or visit various utterly uninteresting people, who called each other *du*, and embraced and conversed in a patois of bad German and worse

English, and sang songs concerning the Vaterland, and decorated their apartments with flowers and small pots of moss and sprigs of evergreen, and who, it is to be hoped, enjoyed the festivities vastly.

To me the whole thing had become almost unendurable. They were not unkind people—no doubt they were admirable and estimable in their way—but the utter want of variety in their remarks and modes of entertaining themselves made me dread a natal or a wedding day with a sinking of heart impossible to describe.

Herr Droigel retained sufficient “of the sentiment of his romantic land” to express the most profound regret when circumstances compelled his absence ; but I shrewdly suspected he had lived long enough amongst literary and artistic people to see the absurdity and feel the monotony of these family gatherings.

When he did attend one of them, he bore his part bravely, ate and drank, and

played accompaniments and danced—yes, danced. I myself have trod a measure with him, and the performance was witnessed, not merely with gravity, but approval by the spectators.

To Madame, however, visiting her relatives constituted the dissipation of her life. For no consideration would she have forgotten an anniversary of birth, death, marriage, or betrothal. A new sister-in-law, nephew, niece, cousin, aroused all her susceptibilities ; and the idea of any person having a relation whom he or she regarded with positive dislike, was something too terrible to realize.

Hitherto I had prudently kept my sentiments well in the background, and the suddenness and frankness of my speech filled her with a terrible astonishment.

“It is wicked,” she went on. “I never thought so gentle an one as thou could talk in that bad, sinful way.”

“I cannot help it, Madame. If it is bad

and sinful to speak the truth, then indeed I am wicked as you say. I dislike Mrs. Isaac Motfield intensely. I am very sorry my uncle ever married her. Perhaps she has made him a good wife—I know nothing about that—but she made me a very bad aunt, and her coming to London will spoil all the pleasure I expected from my uncle's visit."

"What dost thou think of this?" asked Madame, turning to her husband once again.

"I think with you, my treasure, it is very terrible to have a niece utter such decidedly antagonistic observations concerning her admirable aunt; but——"

"My aunt was not admirable to me," I interrupted; "and I see no reason why I should not prevent her staying here, if my opinion can effect so desirable an object. She is less disagreeable and more honest than Mrs. Daniel Motfield; but that is not saying very much in her favour."

"Had you permitted the finishing of my

sentence," remarked Herr Droigel, "you would have found it not necessary to enlarge upon this unpleasant subject. My melody was not complete. You cut the air in two. I was about to modulate into another key, and proceed thus:— But the English nature is different from the German; it has fewer tendrils; it winds itself not readily, though, when it does, the strength of its affection is great. Farther, the artiste temperament is irritable and sensitive; it has its little notches—its difficulties. Evident is it that the spirits of our Annie and the wife of that good uncle Isaac are not *en rapport*. We will not have the hair of our kitten rubbed the wrong way. Sensible Mr. Motfield's commands shall be obeyed to the letter. Those to whom I should have been proud and happy to offer my poor hospitalities shall lodge themselves elsewhere."

"You will not repent your decision," I said, "when you see my amiable rela-

tives—and hear them, too, for that matter. My cousins play and sing.”

“Not as Annie plays and sings,” he suggested.

“In their own opinion a vast deal better, I have not the slightest doubt,” was my reply. “However, it is years since we met, and they may have developed genius and amiability in the interim.”

“And in any event, when they come, you will remember——”

“That if my manners are not pretty, the sin may be laid at your door,” I finished, as he hesitated how to word his request. “Be tranquil. I will put on my best bib-and-tucker and my best behaviour at the same time, and not sing a note if I have even to catch a bad cold to avoid doing so.”

“Perverse one !” exclaimed the Professor, with a pensive smile. “Is she not a spoiled child, this Annie of ours ?” he added, addressing Madame.

To his infinite astonishment Madame

said I was, and said it very much as if she meant it. She could not forgive the blow I had struck at the very roots of family affection, and went sailing out of the room with so comical an air of displeasure and contempt, that her husband involuntarily raised his eyebrows and his shoulders, and, turning to me, uttered the word "Soh!" three times, with a crescendo of such exceeding amazement, that I defy any human being with the smallest sense of the ludicrous to have kept from laughing.

Madame heard the laugh, and imputed it to me as sin. Great trees grow from small seeds. Herr Droigel did not know the nature of the event he had, by his astonishment, planted that day to mature for our mutual benefit.

One day I had a letter from my uncle, in which he explained the mystery of his coming to London accompanied by so many of his household gods. Jemima Jane, to whom reference was made in the early part

of this story as the wearer of my clothes, the appropriatress of my trinkets, had, like me, achieved success, only in a different direction. Her charms had fascinated the son of the woollen-draper ; and although, by reason of his large family, my uncle could not give his daughter so large a *dot* as had been mentally settled by paternal affection as the value of the youth, still, in consideration of Mr. Motfield's respectability, he gave way, and blessed the young lady.

When Herr Droigel's letter arrived, inviting my uncle to visit him, in order to see me and "discuss future events," Mrs. Motfield seized the idea and enlarged upon it—why not give her an outing too?—and Jemima Jane as well. The trousseau could be provided so much better, so much cheaper, in London, and then they should see the sights.

Farther, they should see me, concerning whom they had conflicting notions, gathered

from memory and the newspapers—the first suggesting a disagreeable, insignificant chit of a child—the last filling them with wonder at the idea of a relation of theirs being styled a promising débutante, and getting into print at all. On the sole occasion when I met my relations after leaving Lovedale, Mrs. Isaac Motfield, having, as may be remembered, another engagement, did not accompany her husband to Alford.

There was nothing accordingly to bridge over the chasm of time that had passed since Mrs. Isaac declared “such goings on as mine she would not have in her house ;” and it was only natural she and her daughters should desire to see with their own eyes the sort of animal Annie Trenet might be, who sang in public and could afford to make her uncle a present of a gold watch and chain.

That watch and chain produced a great effect in Fairport.

Uncle Isaac declared laughingly, that it turned the scale in Jemima Jane's behalf; and Herr Droigel said—

“ Ah ! how many a true word is uttered in jest ! What a world this is, where every one is mercenary ! every one sooner or later—I am mercenary ! ”

“ You wont make me believe that readily,” my uncle answered, with frank heartiness.

For pleasure, business cannot stand still ; and though that Fairport letter kept me in an agony of expectation, I went on with my work just as though no kind tried friend were coming to visit London.

We were close on the end of the season, which was not prolonged so late into the summer as is the case now ; and, as is usual at the end of all seasons which have been exceptionally gay and brilliant, the pulse of society seemed to be beating faster than ever. Balls and parties of all sorts followed each other in rapid succession, whilst in the musical world an activity prevailed which

was marvellous—concert succeeding to concert, each largely and fashionably attended.

Had Herr Droigel been gifted with foreknowledge, he could not have chosen a better year for “bringing me out.”

A twelvemonth before, I was but a scholar trembling at Herr Droigel’s frown—wondering whether I should ever be able to sing so that any one might care to hear me ; and now I had to appear once, sometimes twice, a day before an ever-changing public, and it was arranged we—the Professor and myself—were, when the London season was over, to join a party intending to make a provincial tour.

Everything was new to me—almost everything pleasant. I had not yet attained sufficient distinction to provoke jealousy, and Herr Droigel was judicious in two matters ; he always spoke humbly—almost depreciatingly—of my voice, and sedulously abstained from forcing me on the attention of older singers.

If any one who had not noticed me before said, "Who is she?—is that the new voice?" he would answer, "It is only my little girl," or, "My adopted child," until I came to be familiarly known by no other appellations than these—unless, indeed, that of "Droigel's baby."

This used to vex me mightily at the time, though I was wise enough to hide my annoyance; but, looking back, it seems to me that much of the kindly toleration and friendly assistance I experienced in those days were attributable to my sobriquet, rather than to any inherent virtue possessed by myself.

I was as one walking unharmed because unarmed amongst them all. I could sing, of course, and did sing; but still they only thought of me as a child—a baby—of my fat, plausible, self-constituted parent.

He appeared the butt of the artistes' room; the moment he entered seemed the signal for jest and merriment.

“I am so glad you have come,” was the way in which one singer would greet him ; “you are an awful humbug ; but I could better spare a better man.”

“Oh, here is the dear papa Droigel !” another would cry, and straightway kiss him ; and then around would arise a Babel of languages, each man and each woman appealing to the new-comer in his or her own especial tongue.

Amongst them, he looked like Gulliver amongst the Liliputians. He listened to the jabber around with a benign smile, though sometimes, when hard pressed, he would say, with a sigh, “Ah, my dears, you are too hard upon the old father who has indulged you all these years.”

“And who acknowledges a most degenerate family of children,” remarked a lady whose English was so good that it puzzled me when Herr Droigel said she was a Hungarian, and spoke six languages with equal correctness.

“She is simply the cleverest woman I ever knew,” he said. “Gott in Himmel! she has the energy of a dozen men. No marvel her husband died within three months of his marriage. She would do any man to death unless he had ten lives. I can remember her thirty years, and during the whole of that time she has never been sick, or hoarse, or tired, or laid up with the vapours or—her temper, though one would have thought that a malady in itself.”

“Thirty years!” I exclaimed. “Why, she is quite young now!”

“She must be fifty-five now, at the very smallest computation; and as you remember, Annie dear, a Scotch lady remarked that at fifty people do begin to lose the bloom of youth. She has managed to preserve hers, however, as admirably as she manages to do everything else.”

“But you must be mistaken,” I persisted; “why, look at her hair!”

“I have,” he answered, “often.”

“It is black as jet,” I continued.

“True.”

“And yet you say she is fifty-five?”

“I know her age—concerning that of her wig, I have no information!”

“Do you mean to tell me she wears a wig?” I cried.

“Yes, but not a common wig. Like everything else she makes her own, it is unique. Her art is so perfect that it seems more natural than nature. She is wonderful, magnificent, superb.”

And Herr Droigel rolled out these words in a tone of simple faith, holding up his hands the while, as if imploring Heaven to bear witness to his sincerity in uttering them.

“Who was the lady,” I went on to inquire, “that was singing when we got there, and who afterwards, when every one else was laughing and talking, sat apart looking over her music? You bowed to her.”

“That lady—it pleases me to think you

noticed her thus specially—that lady is a saint. She sings in public, and is supposed to pray in private. She has solved the English puzzle of using her talents professionally, and being received almost on an equality in good society. In her way, she is cleverer than our old-young Hungarian. She has found out practically “how to make the best of both worlds,” as illustrious Mr. Binney states theoretically is possible. She has the ear of Exeter Hall. The clergy consider her faultless—original sin, which is no fault of hers, alone excepted. She has the American aptitude for making money, and the British talent of keeping it when made. She does not mix much with other artists. She is in the singing world, but not of it. No Sunday visiting for her. She receives not on that day, unless it may be a Dean or a Bishop, or some great lady. She goes to her church in the morning, and then occupies herself in signing copies all the afternoon. An admirable creature—‘a crown

to her husband,' as the Wise Man says. Her royalties alone must be a pretty penny. We love not each other. She will sing not my songs. I—well, I—do not help her to pupils when a father or mother condescends to ask my advice. Her real name was Stubbs; her father a carpenter at Peterborough. One of the clergy-in-waiting at the cathedral—*canon* is the word, is it not?—heard her voice, and got the organist to instruct it. She has lived under the wings of the Church ever since. With the approval of her patrons, she dropped the Stubbs, and came out as Miss Adela Hawtrey."

In describing this part of my life, I am vague and inconsequent of necessity, because it was some time before the places at which I appeared and the people I met formed themselves into sharp outline before me. It was all so new that I felt like one who, having lived far from towns, is suddenly set down in the midst of a

crowded city. Everything seemed confused and unreal. Unaccustomed as I was to society and excitement, I walked through the first portion of my new existence like one in a dream.

If I had ever imagined that when my public career began drudgery would be over, I should soon have been disabused of this impression.

Not merely had I to work as hard as ever myself, but every one with whom I came in contact worked hard also. Singing, such as should please the multitude, was not, I found, intuitive. Nothing appalled me so much as the ceaseless study I beheld around me. Did we go to the house of an artiste, she was either learning herself or instructing somebody else. Over rehearsals we slaved—I can use no other expression; whilst we waited our turn to appear on the platform, we were poring over our music, humming difficult passages, perfecting our pronunciation.

Sunday, which might have been reserved for rest, was the favourite and appointed time for hearing new songs, for trying over part-music, for making acquaintances, for receiving visits, that all more or less partook of a business character. As little, perhaps, as Miss Hawtrey—who, by the way, was married, and the mother of four children—did I like this mode of keeping the day holy; but what could I do? I was in a vortex which left no time for expostulation or for thought. I had sailed hitherto through quiet seas; and in a moment, so it seemed to me, I was whirling round and round in a perfect *mælstrom* of excitement. What mission had I to set the world right? What power had I to keep myself right? I, who was surrounded on all hands by people holding either a different faith or no faith at all?

Two or three times it is true I ventured to hint to Herr Droigel that our manner of spending the first day in the week did

not quite satisfy me ; but he put aside my objection with—

“ My dear Annie, retain those sentiments ; they are holy, they belong to the best part of our humanity. Unfortunately we cannot always act up to our sentiments. Ah, what a world this would be were that possible ! A certain number of people have to work on Sundays—clergymen, organists, choristers, policemen, engine-drivers, and singers. It is lamentable it should be necessary ; but the fact remains. Happily it is not all the year round : once the season is over, we can be quiet and religious as we like.”

It would have been a great change for Herr Droigel, had he liked to be the latter. Spite of his words in Alford churchyard, I had long been aware of that fact ; but there was no use in seeming to take him at other than his own estimate.

I was in the stream now, and had to go with the current. Our Sundays were a

part and parcel of the unreality of my life. Often I wondered, when listening to a Babel of tongues, or to a bit of practice from an opera, whether it was myself who stood in the midst of that throng or another—the Annie Trenet of days that seemed hundreds of years distant, or a changeling who, having surreptitiously entered that little cottage overlooking the Love, had performed freaks of which no true Motfield would have been guilty—freaks ending in this.

And what struck me with the greatest wonder was, that whilst I had an unceasing sense of wrong-doing oppressing me, no one else had. In my Pharisaism, if it were necessary to do the thing at all, I would have done it in secret. Like the lady who told her little boy to play his marbles in the back yard—which order elicited the inquiry whether it were not Sunday there—I should scarcely have elected to make our performances public. But no one appeared

to dream there was anything to be ashamed of in the matter.

It was business, as Herr Droigel said ; and if there were work to be done, there was no reason why the windows should be closed and the doors barred whilst the work was in progress.

What the neighbours thought of it troubled me at first ; but I soon understood that on much lower grounds than religious scruples no one who was strait-laced would rent a house next door to a professional musician.

After all, who would like to hear Beethoven's sonatas for eight hours a day ? and pianoforte practice is soothing as laudanum compared to vocal.

Sometimes my senses seemed leaving me amid the musical confusion in which we lived.

" You do not appear to like this much," said Herr Droigel to me, as one lovely night we walked home together ; " and yet

I have a memory of hearing consistent Annie once remark that she was so fond of music, she could listen to it for ever."

"I spoke without knowledge then," I answered. "One may like good living, and yet still not care to be eating perpetually. It seems to me we are like cooks in a kitchen—seeing, smelling, tasting perpetually. I thought this evening what a blessing deafness would prove."

"Ah, you mean when that new tenor was making such a diabolic noise."

"Then, and—and all the time. If the public lived, moved, and had their being to the sound of music as we have, they would never go to a concert, and the opera-houses might be closed."

"And yet," he replied, "I dare affirm you were the only ennuyed individual present. Music is the business of artistes. Some day you will take an interest as keen in business as they do."

"Perhaps," I said.

“For certain,” he answered; “and it will not be long before that time arrives. You will have to work hard to catch up to the singers more old, more experienced, than you; and when you are older and have learned much, you will have to go on learning to prevent the young singers catching up and passing you.”

To this I made no reply. The view presented of my employments through life did not seem particularly captivating.

It was whilst incidents and persons were flitting past me in the misty uncertain manner I have tried to describe, that my uncle Isaac arrived in London.

He came unexpectedly, to me at least, and our meeting was in this wise.

A hot close day had been succeeded by a still more sultry evening. Every window in our house was set wide open to catch any stray breath of air which might be wandering about; but none chanced to be abroad. It was an evening when to live

seemed difficult, and to sing impossible ; and yet I stood before the glass taking a farewell glance at myself before appearing before that public which would, I believe, go to a ball or a theatre if the thermometer stood at two hundred in the shade.

That friend of Herr Droigel, to whom, at an earlier period of my London experience, I had sung ere starting for the Continent, was giving his concert of the season, and we were to assist in making it go off well.

He was not a public singer himself, but a celebrated teacher. He was petted by the aristocracy. It was "the thing" to take lessons from him at a fabulous price per ten minutes. Young ladies, whose performances might have made any one with an ear for music gnash his teeth, passed muster—were indeed made much of in stately country houses—because they had been pupils of Signor Dellaro.

Had any one mentioned their names in

that connexion to Signor Dellaro, he would have said with a languid drawl—

“I have heard them sing.”

Rare indeed were the instances when Dellaro roused himself to teach, which most probably was the reason of his popularity: one of the reasons, to speak more correctly, since his indolence, insolence, extortionate charges, no doubt exercised the charm of novelty on those accustomed to consider teachers of any kind mere cattle to be driven.

Be this as it may, however, Dellaro's career had been a triumph—such a triumph, in fact, that he could afford to be generous, and when off guard, occasionally jovial.

In the early part of his career Droigel had stood his friend, and Dellaro was not ungrateful. The consequence of all this being, so far as his acts concerned me, that, spite of his being *very* particular as to the artistes who appeared at his concerts, he

was graciously pleased to observe that if Droigel's baby would sing one of his, Dellaro's, songs, he should be gratified. Not more gratified than Droigel, however—for that I can answer.

“The *crème de la crème* would praise his Annie,” he declared; “the lean dowagers, the well-developed mammas, the daughters so charming, all would be secured at a coup.”

“If I did my part—and he hated himself for that ‘if,’ which suggested a distrust he did not feel—my name would within a week appear on the piano of every fashionable drawing-room in the United Kingdom.”

In imagination, Herr Droigel already beheld me presented, in bold letters, to the attention of British aristocracy thus:

En Silent Hours.

SONG.

Composed, and by permission dedicated to Lady Muriel Brooks,

BY

THEODORE DELLARO.

Sung by MISS TRENET.

“ Ah, my child,” he said, with a mournful shake of his head, “ what a future might not be yours if, with the divine gift of voice, you were but possessed with a mortal passion for fame !”

“ So I am,” I answered ; “ I want to receive more applause than Miss Hawtrey.”

“ Good, good !” exclaimed my master, laughing approvingly ; “ go and get thee ready, little maiden, and the slipper shall yet be fitted to thy foot ; Cinderella and Droigel’s child shall come to great honour.”

Thus it came about I was dressed on that particular evening in all my best, and ready in good time to start with Herr Droigel for the concert-room.

We were early, but there had been previous arrivals, and I found myself amongst quite a crowd of artistes listening to the usual Babel of tongues and confusion of languages. There was the prima donna of the opposition Opera-house—talking to her was a new tenor, who had made his bow to an English audience for

the first time that season : ah, how smooth and sweet flowed on the soft Italian utterances in contrast to the German gabble that came from a group on my right hand !

There was a lady whose dress seemed to occupy the whole room. At first, I thought her beautiful, but a nearer view dispelled this illusion. She was sighing and gasping, and uttering the word “ Ach ! ” in every possible tone of misery.

Droigel asked her what was the matter, and she told him she had no voice—no, not one note—she had caught a cold so fearful ; and then she laid her hand upon an acre of neck made white as snow by judicious art, and sighed again.

“ We have all colds,” she went on, “ all, except Mademoiselle Hawtrey, and she never has a cold, and is never out of voice, and never discomposed. Bah ! look at her.”

And we did look at that estimable lady,

who with calm face and smooth manner was asking Signor Dellaro some questions concerning a song she held in her hand. She hummed a passage in it, to ascertain if her reading were correct.

“That is not right, I am sure,” said Herr Droigel’s Hungarian friend, never pausing in her onward passage to utter this pleasant remark, but flinging it, Parthian-like, behind her.

Miss Hawtrey raised her eyebrows and looked at Signor Dellaro. But the strong-minded lady proved right. The reading was not correct ; and here, at the outset of the evening, were the elements for a crash amongst the harmony.

Such a Babel—in one corner the lady with the hundred yards of tulle, trying at once to save her skirts from damage, and to perfect herself in the words of an English, or rather a Scotch ballad—which, utterly indifferent to the confusion around, she rehearsed out loud.

Anything like that recitation I never heard. She enlisted me into the service, and I did my best to put her right, but it was useless, as she immediately went wrong.

“The, not ze—and for, not four,” exclaimed the Hungarian, so close at her ear that she dropped the music, and with a tragic expression placed both hands on her heart.

“Mein Gott,” she said to me, “dat woman she is awful. No, not for no money would I have her energy, it is dreadful;” and then, with a heartrending sigh and little husky cough, she turned once again to her task.

At last the concert began; there was nothing in the opening piece to interest any of us, and so we remained in our room, hearing every now and then some tremendous bang on the piano, and the cries of a violin in acutest agony.

“Dere, dat is over at last. and a goot

thing too," said my companion; "de next is a quartette. Who sings? — O, I see."

After that there was a move; we all crowded as close to the door leading to the stage as we could get, in order to hear the "bright particular star."

She sang magnificently. "But she is not—no, she is not Serlini," observed Herr Droigel; for which remark the new tenor at once took him to task.

"I should think not," said the gentleman scornfully, in rapid Italian. "I should hope not—her voice is a miracle—herself perfection. Serlini!" and here, at a loss how to express his contempt for that popular favourite, he began to wander amongst the names of all the saints contained in his calendar, and called upon them to witness how superior was the Countess prima donna to anything which had ever gone before or ever could come after her.

For a time Droigel listened, then he

broke out in German ; and not the less terrible was his wrath to hear uttered in that language, because he was obliged to speak almost in a whisper.

Like a torrent he swept on. What did the tenor know about music, or singing, or acting, or—bah ! Serlini needed no knight to tilt for her—England, Europe, the world, were her admirers ; all nations shrined her in their hearts. She was *the* prima donna—not of a season, but of all time—not of one country, but of every land.

“For heaven’s sake be quiet,” said the Hungarian, at this juncture seizing his arm ; “the house will hear you ;” which, indeed, was extremely probable, seeing the singer was at that moment executing a cadenza to the delight of an audience so still that they seemed almost to hold their breath to listen ; and Signor Dellaro—hands suspended over the piano, waiting for her to come to earth again — was

looking anxiously and angrily towards the curtain, behind which we stood peeping.

What a storm of applause ! It filled the room like a strong wind ; it sank, and then began again, over and over. Vainly Madame la Comtesse tried to leave the platform. The audience would not hear of it ; there is a moment's dead silence, and through the stillness her notes rang out ; and we, who being singers ourselves might have been supposed slightly indifferent to the singing of another, listened spell-bound.

"Everything must sound flat after that," said Miss Hawtreys, with a pretty modesty. "I wish I had not to sing to-night."

"So do I," exclaimed the Hungarian, and at this there was a titter, because her words, though apparently innocent, held a double meaning, which we understood perfectly.

"We could not spare *you*, Madame Szeredy," said Herr Droigels, gallantly ; which I thought was going a little too

far, and so tried most imprudently to say something civil to Miss Hawtrey.

“I do not think I have the pleasure of your acquaintance,” she remarked, and turned her back upon me.

“I should think the pleasure of that acquaintance would be all on one side, like some people’s reciprocity,” murmured an Irishman, with a rich brogue, and of course we tittered again.

There is no place in the world where the sense of weariness is so great, and the sense of thankfulness for even a very small joke so keen as in the artistes’ room. If the joke have a flavour of personal bitterness, it is relished naturally all the more.

After the prima donna, and by way of a sensible break between her and the next vocalist, came a pianoforte solo ; then singer succeeded to singer. The Hungarian, who, having been engaged in a sharp passage of words with an impracticable bass, who had ventured to disagree with

her, left us with the expression of a devil, and was next moment smiling like an angel to the audience ; Miss Hawtrey, who was received with enthusiasm as an old and established favourite ; the tenor, who took part in a trio ; my friend, who had forgotten the pronunciation of every word—which was of the less consequence, as no human being could hear a distinct syllable ; then ten minutes' interval—during which we had most of us wine, a few of us water ; then a general shaking-out of dresses on the part of the ladies, and much contemplation of themselves in mirrors on the part of the gentlemen ; then the performances reopened with a duet ; and then—

“Courage, Annie !” said Herr Droigel.

As we passed Miss Hawtrey, I saw her touch her companion the tenor, who looked at me with an amused smile, whilst she kept her eyes fixed on my face with an insolent stare.

“You are trying to make me nervous,”

I thought. "Well, we shall see;" and with heightened colour, and my head held a little more erect than usual, I passed on.

The audience was in high good humour. No person except a singer can have an idea of the difference it makes whether those who have preceded her have been good or the reverse. So far the concert had proved exceptionally successful. The vocalists and instrumentalists had done their best, the selections were judicious, the accompanying perfection; and the consequence of all this was that when I appeared on the platform there arose such a tempest of clapping, that I had to curtsy an exceptional number of times, and Droigel was obliged to pause before commencing the accompaniment.

Then I opened my music—I could sing without it, but the sheet gave me a sort of artificial courage—and began.

The song was simply exquisite. It is one that to this day sells in that mysterious

manner in which some old songs do sell, though no human being can imagine who buys them. It was a simple melody, linked to charming words; and I suppose I must have sung it well, for the applause which followed was sufficient to make Miss Hawtrey's heart stand still with amazement.

"You have made them weep," said Droigel, as, proud and happy, he followed me down the steps and behind the curtain, where stood Dellaro, radiant with delight.

"I could kiss you, child; you are a marvel," he exclaimed; "but you will have to go on again—do not you hear them?"

I did hear them; I was not deaf; and the clapping was louder than ever, when I, led on by the Signor, reappeared to make my curtsy. That was not, however, all they wanted.

"The last two verses," said Dellaro, in a

hurried whisper : and he seated himself at the piano, in order to save time and prevent confusion.

He did not accompany so well as Droigel; but what mattered that? I was warm to my work, and could have sung just as well without any instrument at all.

I had won my spurs that night ; I knew it, I felt it. The ball was at my feet, the full goblet at my lips. Yes, I had done all, and more than all my most sanguine friends had ever prophesied.

The hearts of the people were touched. I, Annie Trenet, had done it : I had brought tears to eyes I might never look into — sent never-to-be-forgotten sounds into ears no spoken word of mine might, save in song, ever reach. I was triumphant ; I felt almost delirious in my joy as I walked back into the artistes' room, clapping and applause still following my retiring steps.

“I beg to congratulate you most

heartily," said Miss Hawtrey, rising, and coming to meet me.

Whilst I was answering her with what grace I might, some one said, sarcastically, "The king is dead ; long live the king !" and she winced and turned white, as though she had received a blow. Just then Herr Droigel came hurrying up to me.

"Put on your wraps, dear child, and let us get away. Thou art tired, and there's yet another pleasure for thee."

I clasped my fur tippet—in those days jackets as yet were not—drew a hood over my head, and slipped my hand into his arm.

We descended the stairs, threaded the passages, and gained the vestibule of the private entrance.

"What is it?" I had panted out as he hurried me along.

Now he answered—

"Who is that?"

A man stood near the doorway in deep

shadow. I could not see his face, but I guessed who it was in a moment.

“Uncle Isaac!” I cried; and as he stretched out his arms, I flung mine round his neck, and kissed him over and over again.

“I am so glad—so glad!” was all I could say.

“And so am I,” he replied. “Oh, Nannie, if my mother could but have lived to come with me and hear you sing as you sang to-night!”

“Do you think she would have liked it?” I asked.

“Liked it! I suppose, Nan, I ought to be ashamed to confess, but I am not; I have been crying like a child.”

All this time Herr Droigel stood apart, blowing his nose ostentatiously.

“Was not Droigel right?” he said as we drove home all together, shaking his fist in the face of some imaginary antagonist. “Was he not, you just tell me that? Ha!”



CHAPTER IV.

MY RELATIONS.

MY uncle supped with us that night. When we reached home I ran up stairs, took off my fur tippet and evening finery, put on a plain muslin dress, and went down to ask “if I did not look more like myself?”

“I do not think the old self is much changed,” said my uncle, fondly. A happy man was he. Once or twice he laid down his knife and fork, and turned round to look at me nestling close beside him.

“Now I wonder whether I am awake or dreaming?” he remarked, at length. “I must pinch myself to find out.”

“‘If Giles, I’ve lost two horses, to my cost.

If not, odd bodkins! I have found a cart,’”

I quoted gleefully. "Uncle, were you not very proud of me to-night? I can assure you I felt very glad of myself—to borrow a phrase from Signor Dellarò."

"Why most particular to-night?" inquired Madame.

"I am modest," I answered; "ask Herr Droigel."

"Because," he said—"Ach! how can I reproduce the scene?—because she sang as she has sung never before—because she took the house with her, and made that being angelic, Miss Hawtrey, turn white with envy—because to-night more than ever she is the child of Droigel—his soul child—to express my stupid thought."

"I am sure Annie and I owe a debt of gratitude to you we can never repay," remarked my uncle. But the Professor put this aside with a wave of his hand.

"It might have been a matter of business and interest once," he said, with a mixture of pathos and tenderness, "but that time

has gone and passed. Between her and Gretchen his love now could distinguish no difference. Is it not so, wife of mine?" he asked, turning to Madame for confirmation of this, as he did when she was present of all other deviations from truth.

"Yes." Madame could not say the reverse; so great was his love that had her Gretchen not a disposition most amiable, she might have cause for jealousy.

"Absurd, mother!" exclaimed Gretchen, in anything rather than an amiable manner.

"My child!" said Herr Droigel, reprovingly.

"True, papa," observed Gretchen, quickly, "it was very rude, and I beg pardon; but the idea of my being jealous of Annie!" And to my intense surprise she came round from where she sat and kissed me. "Papa may be as fond of you as he likes," she went on, addressing my astonished self, "but he could not make me jealous. Remember that—no one could

make me jealous of you;" and then with a heightened colour she returned to her seat, while I, to change a conversation which had suddenly turned into a dangerous, and to me, unintelligible channel, asked my uncle about Mrs. Isaac and the children, Tommy especially.

Next morning I had the pleasure of seeing my aunt and the young ladies. I walked round before breakfast to their lodgings, which were close at hand, and had the pleasure of partaking of that meal with those who were, so said my aunt, "my own blood-relations—and blood is thicker than water, you know, my dear," she added, as if stating some curious physical fact *caviare* to the multitude.

On the whole, looking at my relations, I thought I preferred water. Time and prosperity had not improved my aunt's appearance: the former had rendered her very stout and florid, the latter had caused her to affect dresses of staring colours and

remarkable patterns. She had attained to the possession of that massive cable-pattern chain mentioned in an early part of this story, and her manner was a curious mixture of self-assertion and subserviency.

She always seemed on the point of lording her position over me as in the old times departed, but changed her tone when she suddenly remembered my position was as good as hers.

“Not quite so respectable,” she took care to inform me before she left London, “as might have been wished; but then people cannot pick and choose, and it is wonderful how lucky you have been.”

It never occurred to Mrs. Isaac that my own endeavours had in the smallest degree contributed to my success; she regarded the whole matter as she might a fortunate draw in a lottery—which way of regarding artistic success is not, I find, uncommon.

In my aunt's estimation, had Heaven

been just or the fates auspicious, Jemima Jane or some other of her daughters, should have attracted the notice of Herr Droigel, in which case, as she concisely stated her opinion to the Professor, "There would have been something to show for the money."

"You are an epigrammatic dear lady," answered the Professor, which phrase Mrs. Isaac happily took to mean something eminently complimentary, and said afterwards to her friends at Fairport that "Really, *for a German*, Herr Droigel seemed a very intelligent sort of person."

I could not—though I have always tried to abstain from fetching and carrying—resist repeating this utterance to my master, who laughed at it till his sides ached.

Indeed, I fear he and I took a considerable amount of amusement out of Mrs. Isaac. If we talked a little less about the follies and vulgarities of her offspring, it

was only human—they chanced, unhappily, to be uncle Isaac's children as well.

Those were the days when extremely full dresses were worn—full at the bottom, equally full at the waist—and my cousins had thought it necessary to develop an amount of bustle and of gathers and double gathers on their hips, which gave them an extraordinary appearance. Bodices were then worn peaked or rounded in front, and fastened up behind with hooks and eyes. A back as flat as a pasteboard, and of immense length, was considered part of a “fine figure” at Fairport, I discovered; and I found also, from listening to my aunt's conversation, that the greater the number of breadths which could be coaxed into a skirt the more fashionable it was considered.

“You mayn't believe me,” said Mrs. Isaac, who evidently considered my attire behind the age, “but Jemima has ten breaths”—thus she pronounced ‘breadths’—“in that

gown she is wearing, and every one is a yard wide. Get up, dear, and let your cousin see."

I did see. Jemima Jane arose, and favoured me with a view of her person. She was well-grown and large-boned—together the sort of frame on which a light blue dress, with an immense checked pattern, might be supposed to show to advantage.

"It's very stylish and genteel," suggested my aunt.

"It is very uncommon," I assented.

"We said, when we see Annie we'll see the fashions," she went on, looking disparagingly at my dress; "but you never were much of a one for showing off clothes, or making the most of yourself."

"I am afraid I was not," I replied; "but you will see plenty of dress and fashion when you go into Regent Street and the Park."

"Of course, Annie, you are going to

show us the lions!" interposed Jemima Jane, turning her engaged ring round and round a stubby red finger.

"I am not my own mistress," I answered, with a smile born of gratitude at the thought.

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed Mrs. Isaac, jubilantly; "we'll ask your teacher to give you a holiday."

"Thank you, aunt," I said, demurely.

Just then my uncle entered, accompanied by Herr Droigel. Already the former had taken a walk into the Strand, thence through St. James's Park, returning by the Horse Guards; then he had walked down Parliament Street and crossed Westminster Bridge, making his way back by Blackfriars and Fleet Street, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and a few other short cuts to our house, north of what was then called the City Road. There he picked up Herr Droigel, who had happily already breakfasted, and who, smiling benigantly, was

introduced to Mrs. Isaac and the young ladies.

“I was just saying,” began my aunt, after her offer of weak tea and cold toast had been declined, “that we would ask you to give Annie a holiday. We want to buy some things.” Then she looked mysterious, and the girls commenced to giggle.

“Herr Droigel knows all about the matter, my dear,” said her husband.

“Well, indeed, it would have been too bad to make a stranger of you after all you have done for Annie,” she went on, directing her reply to the Professor; “and there is nothing to be ashamed of that I can see in a daughter being about to settle herself suitably and respectably——”

“Ashamed, Madame!” cried Herr Droigel. “It is a thing to glory in—to rejoice over. And which young Miss is it that means to make her betrothed so happy?”

“Oh, my eldest, of course,” said the proud mother, indicating Jemima, who coloured, and simpered, and bridled.

“Why, of course?” asked Droigel, innocently. “There is no order of precedence in marriage in England, is there?”

“Not exactly,” explained my aunt; “but first come first served, you know.”

“True: an adage most admirable. Ah! what a fortunate man to be this young lady’s choice! And so you desire that Annie should assist in selecting the trousseau? Her time, as you know, dear Madame, is much occupied, but still she shall go. Yes, we can manage it, Annie, is it not so? But you must take care of yourself—no headache—no white tired face——”

“Annie isn’t delicate,” interposed Mrs. Isaac; “she always looked thin and pale, but she never ailed like my children. Little as any one might think it, I have known my girls forced to go to bed ill,

while their cousin played herself about on the sands."

Which was indeed quite true ; but then her girls were given to over-eating, and even had my inclinations been in that direction, there would have lain no possible means of gratifying them.

"Strange!" mused Herr Droigel. "And yet your young misses now put the cheeks of my Annie to reproach. They look indeed in insolent health."

"You mean rude health, don't you, Herr Droigel?" I suggested, laughing at his assumption of ignorance at my aunt's look of horrified astonishment.

"Are the words not identical?" he inquired, surveying us all with a bland smile. "My dear Madame, forgive this stupid fellow. Out of my music I am a fool."

"We can't allow that, can we, papa?" said Mrs. Isaac, her good humour restored, appealing to the father of her children. "So Annie may come?" she went on. "I

am sure she ought to be very much obliged to you."

"Herr Droigel is aware of my sentiments, aunt," I remarked.

"But, Madame, pardon," began the Professor, "I am dull, and I cannot see how this dear Annie will help the momentous choice. You take her into a shop, and set her down before a counter. Shopman brings rolls of silks and satins. Annie would buy anything she was told. She is still a child—a baby. If you want help, judgment, some one able to talk to the British tradesman, take my Gretchen. Aha! I tell our Annie her little gift of song should have come to Gretchen—that she is in unlawful possession of stolen goods."

"I think that myself," said Mrs. Isaac. "It is better to be born lucky than rich, as the saying is. And Annie has been a lucky girl. I only hope she is sufficiently thankful for all the good fortune

that has dropped into her lap. When I look back and think about her, the whole story seems like a fairy tale."

"So it does to me," I remarked, "extremely like Cinderella and the glass slipper, only I have neither seen nor danced with the Prince as yet."

"Annie, Annie," remonstrated the Professor, in a stage whisper, whilst Mrs. Isaac coloured, and the girls tittered, and my uncle rising, said, "If we mean to do anything to-day, had we not better be doing it without more delay?"

"Yes, yes," cried Herr Droigel, eagerly, "and you, dear sir, trust yourself to me, is it not so? whilst the ladies exchange their private confidences. Annie, if Gretchen can be of any service on your delicate mission, she is as ever ready to answer to your beck and call. We meet together at a friendly tea. Till then——" The remainder of the sentence was lost in an elaborate and comprehensive bow.

“What a funny man!” remarked Jemima Jane, as the door closed behind him.

“He is nice though, and good-natured,” said her sister.

“It is nothing short of a miracle that Annie should have fallen on such a friend,” observed Mrs. Isaac. She did not approve of miracles being wrought in favour of any one outside her own family, and her tone expressed this feeling.

“I think I shall go round for Gretchen,” I began; “she knows far more about shops and shopping than I do.”

“But remember you are to come with us as well,” exclaimed Jemima, who was sharp enough to understand I had meditated escaping from the expedition.

“Of course,” was my resigned answer.

“Cannot we go to Herr Droigel’s with you?” asked my aunt.

“It would be out of your way. I shall be back by the time you and the girls are ready.” And without waiting for further

suggestions, I ran downstairs, and left the trio to criticize me at their leisure.

Gretchen I knew would impress them. I longed to see Mrs. Isaac's face when she beheld that young person ; and I walked rapidly homeward, thinking the while which dress I should like her to wear—which of her bonnets was most becoming to her.

“This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Trenet,” were the words that roused me from an imaginary contemplation of Gretchen, clad in a light blue muslin that I particularly admired, flecked with white spots, and flounced to perfection ; and with a slight start I stopped suddenly, and, looking up, found myself face to face with Mr. Sylvester.

There he stood—the same handsome, courteous gentleman I could remember knowing by sight and hearsay for more than half my lifetime, but his manner was kinder and more cordial than I had ever

felt it in my London experience of his acquaintance, and he smiled even while he apologized for startling me.

“I was surprised to meet you all alone,” he said; “I have just seen Miss Droigel, and she told me you were spending the day with some relatives.”

“I shall have to spend it with them,” I answered, so ruefully that he smiled again. “I am now on my way to ask Gretchen to go shopping with us.”

“An occupation ladies delight in, I am told.”

“I do not,” was my reply. “Gretchen does though, I think; but then, she understands all about it—that makes such a difference.”

“I suppose so. She delights in shopping for the same reason that you delight in music.”

“I do not delight in music.”

“What! tired of it already, notwithstanding the enthusiastic manner in which

your song was received last night? I never heard more hearty applause."

"Were you there?" I asked. "I did not see you."

"I was not in the reserved seats; I sat near your uncle, whom I know by sight, and thought of introducing myself, and saying something I have decided I ought to repeat to you or him."

"What is it? why not say it to me?"

"I will, having had the good fortune to meet you. You must remember how difficult—impossible, I might substitute—it has been to speak a sentence to you alone."

"I am not likely to forget that," I replied; "but Herr Droigel means it entirely for my good."

"The course he pursues is judicious," returned Mr. Sylvester, "and I for one should not resent it, were his restrictions less sweeping. However, I have found my opportunity, and this is what I want to

say :—One day when Madame Serlini was speaking about you and Herr Droigel—observing what a marvellous teacher he was, and so forth—she remarked that she hoped your guardians, whoever they might be, would see you did not enter hastily into agreements for any lengthened period.”

“I do not exactly understand what you mean,” I said.

“You understand that, according to his own statement, Droigel is a child of nature.”

“Yes,” I answered, laughing.

“Well, then, what Madame Serlini evidently thinks is, that he is a child who knows much more of the world and its ways than you, and who will very probably try to make an exceedingly good thing out of your future.”

“But of course he expects to make money by my singing,” I replied.

“Of course ; but if you must sing, you ought to make money too—that is all. I

hope you will not consider me officious or troublesome for having mentioned this matter to you ?”

“ Oh ! no, indeed : I am most grateful.”

“ Perhaps you will talk it over with your uncle ?”

“ I think not,” I said, after a moment’s hesitation.

“ May I ask why not ?”

“ You know what sort of person Herr Droigel is as well as I,” was my reply ; “ at least, perhaps not quite so well, but that makes no difference. Now, my uncle believes him to be precisely what he calls himself—a man who wears his heart on his sleeve.”

“ And therefore——” suggested Mr. Sylvester.

I paused.

“ He is happy in knowing I have such a good home—that my welfare is looked after by one whom he imagines to be utterly unselfish and straightforward.”

“Yes?” It was all my companion said, but it was interrogative.

“If I told him that Herr Droigel, though so kind to and fond of me, is—a—a—I scarcely know how to express myself.”

“Humbug,” added Mr. Sylvester.

“I think that is what I mean,” I agreed, though a feeling I could scarcely define prevented my repeating the word. “My uncle would get anxious about me, and he could do nothing—no one could do anything. Herr Droigel may not be always quite—true,” I went on, desperately, “but next to my grandmother and uncle Isaac he has been the best friend I ever had. I love them all—Herr Droigel, Madame, and Gretchen—they have been good and kind to me; and I am very, very much obliged to you, but please do not say anything about this to any one, and I will not either.”

I held out my hand as I finished my sentence, feeling in a great flutter of ner-

vousness and apprehension—nervousness at having spoken so freely to Mr. Sylvester, apprehension lest Herr Droigel should by any evil chance pass that way, and see me talking to him.

“Good-bye,” said Mr. Sylvester, with a grave smile; adding, “then you think you are quite capable of taking care of yourself?”

“I am taken almost too much care of,” I answered. “As to money, except that I wished to make a success, and prove what Gretchen calls a ‘good speculation,’ I have never given it a thought until now.”

“Pity you ever should have to give it a thought,” he remarked. “If I can be of use to you at any time, remember you have another friend besides Herr Droigel and your uncle.”

He was gone, to my intense relief; he raised his hat, and turned slowly away. Never during the whole time passed under Herr Droigel’s roof had I ever kept a secret

from my master, and how I was to face Gretchen and tell her nothing of my interview, puzzled me not a little.

So great indeed was my perplexity that I went a little round, in order to compose my feelings; indeed, I took quite a *détour*, and thus added another sin to those already committed.

And yet there was a sense of guilty joy in my heart as I walked up one street, and along another, and down a third—I felt like a prisoner who has broken bounds; but still there was a sense of delight in remembering that I had been for a few minutes, that I was still for a few minutes, free. So much did this novel sensation impress me, that I began to speculate whether one day I might not obtain my liberty altogether, and go about and see people as Gretchen did, unattended—without anybody saying me “yea” or “nay.”

I was, however, notwithstanding all these audacious ideas, too much of a coward and

a captive to dare prolong my walk ; and so after a delay which certainly did not exceed ten minutes, I knocked at Herr Droigel's door.

When she heard my voice, Gretchen came into the hall.

"Your papa said you would go out with us to-day," I began ; "I hope you will. My aunt knows nothing about London, and I know nothing of shopping ; and she wants to buy the trousseau."

"That is certainly more my department than yours," answered Gretchen, "but you must not expect me to go without you."

"No. I have promised them to return as soon as possible. And, Gretchen, put on your blue muslin and the new bonnet."

"What ! waste all that sweetness on Aunt Jane?" exclaimed Gretchen, in amazement.

"She evidently thinks I am such a dowdy," I said, in explanation.

“So that for the honour of the establishment——” began Gretchen. “Well, if I must—I must.” And she ran up to the first landing, where she paused to say, “By-the-bye, Annie, you have just contrived to miss seeing an admirer of yours.”

Though my thoughts were full of Mr. Sylvester, the word she employed threw them off that track, and I exclaimed—

“Signor Dellarò? He was wonderfully gracious and complimentary last night.”

“No; there has been a note from Dellarò, speaking of you in the tenderest manner—written evidently after supper, but that fact does not detract from the merits of the composition. Our early visitor was Miss Cleeves’ friend, Mr. Sylvester. He came to leave his congratulations, or condolences, on your latest triumph. He seemed very much at a loss how to express his feelings, however. I fancy although he likes listening to singing, he considers singing in itself a sinful recreation. Still, he

acknowledged the reception you met with was marvellous. I suggested it was something like what Miss Cleeves desired to experience, and he instantly froze into an iceberg. After all, I think Miss Cleeves was right. For my part, I would as soon marry Sir Charles Grandison."

"I suppose I ought to feel very much obliged to him," I said ; the consciousness of deceit lying like a crime at my heart.

"Of course you ought ; though why, I have not the faintest idea. But I suppose it is a marvellous act of condescension for any one connected with the Wiffordes even to speak to an artiste. Of course it is all for love of Miss Cleeves. He knows she likes you, and thinks to please her by calling. But he would rather not have called—I could see that. When he found that papa was out and mamma invisible, he fled from the drawing-room. I can use no other word to express the precipitate manner in which he

retired. Now I shall go and dress, and astonish Mrs. Isaac Motfield with a vision of loveliness."

Which she did.





CHAPTER V.

A LITTLE MUSIC.

NO person need ever desire to see another more amazed than my aunt was at sight of Miss Gretchen Droigel. She was so surprised that for a few moments she actually lost fluency of utterance, whilst the girls remained dumb. By the time however they had closely scrutinized and mentally appraised Gretchen's attire, they felt consoled. After all, she only wore a muslin—ay, but such a muslin! only a silken scarf—but worn with such coquettish grace. Only a white aërophane bonnet, trimmed with a little lace, and ornamented by a blush rose, leaves, and bud—but oh! what a beautiful face it shaded. After all, they were as well dressed as

she, in their own opinion; and when people turned round in the street to stare at our party, as well they might, my cousins attributed these marks of respect to their own attractions; whereas, it was only the discrepancy between Gretchen's appearance and theirs which rendered us all so conspicuous. Indeed, it was not long before Mrs. Isaac took occasion to inform me—

“You are just as insignificant-looking as ever, Annie.”

“Yes, aunt,” I replied, meekly; but I did not add, that out in the London streets is about the last place in the world where a woman would wish to look significant. Oh! that day—that weary, weary day—the horrors of which seem to lengthen themselves out once more as memory recalls their misery.

Gretchen was by instinct too genuinely a citizen of the world, she was by habit and training too thoroughly a Londoner, to

feel as annoyances those things which were to my different nature, to my narrower experience, torture.

She thought nothing of our being expected to stand five in a row along the pavement, whilst Mrs. Isaac and her daughters poured forth voluble inquiries concerning this building, or that statue (Mrs. Isaac pronounced the latter word statute). She was willing to stop at every attractive shop-window for such a time that I momentarily dreaded a policeman asking us to move on. She remained languidly indifferent, whilst my aunt had half a shopful of goods brought down for her inspection, and then walked out after buying nothing ; remarking in a patronizing manner that she would perhaps call again. In one place, when this statement was made, I saw the man wink to his neighbour, who winked in return, and then coughed vigorously.

“I cannot endure this much longer,

Gretchen," I said, when at length Jemima Jane, having seen a silk which she desired for her wedding-dress, her mother commenced a "deal" for it, by offering the shopman one-half the price he asked. "I feel ready to sink into the ground with shame."

"If you can manage to sink into the ground, why not do so?" she inquired; "but as for the shame, it is nonsense. She is only doing what all country people do, and the shopkeepers look upon it as a matter of course. Besides, you and I are not chaffering. Make yourself happy;" and she continued drawing a design upon the floor with her parasol, till Mrs. Isaac appealed to her if she did not consider the silk very dear.

Then Gretchen arose—how I envied her imperturbable composure!—laid her hand, encased in a delicate-coloured glove, on the silk, examined its quality, its width, its peculiar shade.

"I think it reasonable in price," she said,

and the matter was settled. The silk was cut off, the account made out, the money paid, and when Mrs. Isaac was outside the shop, Gretchen told that lady she had got a dead bargain.

I am now inclined to doubt the fact. Gretchen is an admirable manager, and dresses in the most exquisite manner on an allowance which, ample as it is, seems to me small for the results produced ; and yet whenever she writes to tell me she has seen some "marvellous bargain," I always hasten to reply I do not want anything of the kind, lest a parcel should appear by an early train.

Those silks, satins, furs, and laces which proved such bargains to Gretchen, never turned out cheap to me.

She was her father's daughter, though happily deficient in his culinary tastes. It is not necessary to do more than indicate the fact of their mutual resemblance in order to make the reader understand why I be-

lieve Mrs. Isaac paid more for her daughter's wedding-dress than she might under different auspices.

We went from street to street, we entered shop after shop, and our proceedings seemed to me a perpetual *Da Capo*. I had always hated *Da Capos* in music ; how much more did I hate them in the actions of human beings.

If a thoroughfare had to be crossed, the feat was always effected after an amount of deliberation, a number of falterings, and a succession of false starts, which sometimes, though unhappily not always, brought a policeman to the rescue.

The number of sixpences I expended that day on the Force, I regarded as an act of expiation for the dislike with which my kindred inspired me.

Fancy three of them making a dart at a crossing—one backing, one taking a flying leap to the opposite curbstone, one standing still among the objurgations of omnibus-

drivers, the "Now then, missus" of cabmen, the hidden jeers of street Arabs, who in tones of sympathy offered assistance, always indignantly refused. Imagine people who would not keep to their own side of the pavement, who, eternally in the way themselves, complained of "pushing," and got into wordy arguments, which I and Gretchen had to explain and apologize for. Conceive of all this on a broiling summer's day—but what folly I am writing!

Has not every person resident in London gone through the ordeal? Why should its horrors be reproduced in detail?

The culminating point, however, of my misery occurred in a pastrycook's shop, whither we all repaired to refresh our strength and injure our digestions. Ordinarily, Gretchen and I were rather given to spend money freely at such establishments, but on that special day I was so utterly exhausted with the heat, so tired with the clatter of my aunt's tongue, so ill

with mortification and absolute fatigue, that the mere sight of the sticky cakes, the swarming flies, the jam tarts that looked as if they never could get cool, filled me with disgust.

From that hour to this I have never voluntarily entered a confectioner's.

"Now, Miss Droigel, what will you take?" asked my aunt, who, though disagreeable, was not inhospitable.

"I?" said Gretchen. "An ice, thank you. Vanille," she added, addressing herself to the young person behind the counter, who was by no means so marvellous a creation as the young person now to be beheld there.

"Well," remarked Mrs. Isaac, "I'm hungry, so I should like something substantial. What have you, young woman?" This to the predecessor in ringlets of the naughty young females that in enormous chignons now dispense refreshments to an ever-increasing population.

“Sausage rolls, beefsteak pies, pork pies,” responded the young woman, glibly.

“I’ll try a pork pie,” said Mrs. Isaac ; and, good heavens ! the thermometer stood at some infinite number of degrees in the shade. “And now, what are you going to have, Annie ?”

“Nothing, thank you,” I answered.

“Nothing ! Nonsense, it wont cost you anything. Of course I mean to pay for all.”

“I cannot eat,” I replied.

“How absurd you are, Annie !” said Gretchen. “Have an ice ?” But I shook my head.

“Should you like a glass of water, Miss ?” asked the shopwoman, seeing, no doubt, that I looked weary.

“Yes, and have some jelly,” Gretchen suggested.

“No jelly, thank you,” I interposed.

“Mercy upon us, child, what do you live on ?” asked my aunt. “Is there nothing you like ?”

“She likes me,” replied Gretchen.

“I am certain no one could help liking you,” said Mrs. Isaac, with wonderful heartiness.

By this time we were all served according to our several fancies. Seated beside a small round table, my aunt — shawl unfastened, bonnet strings economically untied and flung back over her shoulders, gloves off, and rolled up into a little tidy ball — ate her pie, whilst her two daughters, determined to follow Gretchen’s lead without Gretchen’s experience, gave themselves toothache by putting great spoonfuls of strawberry and raspberry ice into their mouths, and swallowing the same, with much trouble to themselves and pain to the beholders.

My chair chanced to be placed so that I faced the wall, where I could catch a reflection of our party, and persons who passed up and down the shop in a glass, with which it was possible for me to see sideways.

Those of us who were not pale with the heat, were red—a rich full-blown crimson; and the young ladies, my cousins, were making themselves redder by swallowing those wretched ices, in the same manner as a small quantity of water only serves to increase the intensity of flame issuing from a burning house.

Further they had a plate of sponge cakes, to which they paid devoted court, and with the contents whereof they were crumbing themselves all over. From them I stole a look at Gretchen, cool, self-possessed—a little paler than usual, but otherwise unchanged mentally or physically. My relations did not put her out. Why should they, not being hers? The weather did not affect Gretchen. She neither turned blue in winter nor red in summer. Happy Gretchen! Happy, thrice happy at that moment, in not being me!

For after pausing to pay the young person who presided a little higher up the

shop, a gentleman walked slowly out, raising his hat to Gretchen as he passed.

His glance took in our group. I could see that in the mirror. I knew who it was, but I did not turn my head.

“Who is that gentleman?” asked my aunt, in a hurried whisper, before the door closed behind him.

“An acquaintance of papa’s,” said Gretchen, calmly. Oh, Gretchen! how I blessed you for those four words.

“His face seems to me familiar,” remarked Mrs. Isaac. “I must have seen him, or some one the living image of him, at some time.”

“Possibly you have seen him,” suggested Gretchen. “He goes about a great deal, and visits at a number of country houses.”

“La, ma! he’s the very moral of Mr. Sylvester, that used to come to Fairport with the Miss Wiffordes,” said Jemima Jane, her accuracy of language being as remarkable as was her mother’s.

“His name is Birwood, I think,” said Gretchen, unmoved. “But papa does not know much of him.”

“Oh!” commented Mrs. Isaac. “He is certainly uncommon like Mr. Sylvester.”

“I fancy everybody is like somebody else,” observed Miss Droigel, without a change of countenance. “If your friend resembles Mr. Birwood, he resembles an extremely unpleasant person.”

“Mr. Sylvester is no friend of ours,” interposed my aunt, eagerly. “He is a high and mighty gentleman, he is—some sort of relation to those ladies who drove my poor husband’s mother away from her home, and all belonging to her, in her old age. I have never set eyes on him except riding along the parade, or driving with the Miss Wiffordes.”

“Those are the dames of high degree you stood in such awe of, Annie, are they not?” said Gretchen.

“Well she might,” exclaimed Mrs. Isaac.

“I dare say Annie has many a sad thought, even now, of all the trouble she brought to her poor old grandmother, who fairly worshipped the ground she walked on. She set up for herself an idol, and she reaped her reward. Ah !” And my aunt shook her head as if she was reading a tract, every word of which applied with twenty-horse power to the past or present or future state of some sinner—not herself.

“From all I have heard, I should say so,” remarked Gretchen. “Mrs. Motfield deserved love, devotion, consideration, and she received all three.”

“Well, well, we wont talk about that any more,” said Mrs. Isaac.

“I think it will be better not,” agreed Gretchen ; and I noticed from this time a decrease in my aunt’s cordiality of manner towards Miss Droigel, which change Gretchen accepted with her accustomed equanimity.

While my aunt was settling for her provisions, which she did after the usual amount of grumbling and bargaining, with which I was growing familiar, and her daughters were settling their bonnets and composing their faces before the mirror, I took occasion to whisper to Gretchen—

“Why did you not say it was Mr. Sylvester Birwood?”

“Should you have wished me to say anything of the kind?” retorted Gretchen; and as she spoke I felt as though I were passing through a fire. My cheeks had colour enough in them when Jemima Jane turned from the glass.

“Gracious, Annie, do you carry rouge about with you?” she inquired. “You were white as a lily a minute ago, and now you look like a rose.”

The circumstance of being engaged lent an occasional semblance of poetry to Miss Motfield’s remarks.

“Miss Trenet carries her rouge in a casket

whence you will never be able to produce any," said Gretchen, heartily.

Perfectly well Jemima understood a sneer lay hidden away in this sentence, but she declined to search for it.

"I suppose you say that because she is a singer," was the way in which she parried the blow.

"Perhaps, and for other reasons too numerous to explain."

"Living in London makes people very clever, I think," remarked Jemima.

"Do you think it has made your cousin clever?" asked Gretchen.

Jemima looked at me dubiously. "You must not try to be civil at the expense of candour," I said, coming to her rescue. "No one ever thought me clever, and no one ever will."

"If we are to see Westminster Abbey, we have no time to lose," cried my aunt at this juncture.

Oh these country people! let them be

old or young, weak or strong, men or women, they have when in London but one dominant idea—to see as much and to enjoy as little as possible.

Had we not done enough and seen enough for one day? Well, well, we went to the Abbey, and saw as much of it as we could before afternoon service, to which we stayed, and which Mrs. Isaac considered a “poor affair.”

After that we had a turn round the Houses of Parliament, made a *détour* into St. James’s Park, saw Buckingham Palace and the Duke of York’s statue, and made our way along Pall Mall to St. Martin’s Lane, where we took omnibus for home.

“I wish these people had not come; I wish they were gone,” said Gretchen, as she turned to me, sitting utterly weary and worn on the side of her bed. I had given up my room to the use of Mrs. Isaac and her daughters, and thus it chanced Gretchen

and I were arraying ourselves for the family tea in company.

“That woman does not like you ; she will do harm if she can.”

“She cannot do me any harm,” I replied.

“We shall see,” remarked Gretchen. “I think I foresee.”

“What do you foresee ?” I asked.

“Sufficient for the day,” she answered. “I fancy this day has been more than sufficient for you.”

“My head is aching, and I am tired to death.”

“Precisely what papa expected. He said to me, ‘Annie shall go and wear herself out the first day, after which I must interpose my authority.’”

“I wish he had interposed it to-day,” I remarked.

“And been compelled to go on interposing. No—I admire papa’s tactics on this occasion. He wanted to free you at one blow, and you shall see how splendidly he will do it.”

As she spoke I thought of what had passed between me and Mr. Sylvester concerning the Professor; and half in weariness, half in fright, I uttered a deep sigh, and hid my face in the pillow.

Gretchen crossed the room, her hair streaming down her back, and laid her hand on my shoulder.

“You must not give up in that manner, young lady,” she said. “Make an effort for this evening, and you shall be free hereafter, I promise you, little woman;” and she kissed my cheek with new tenderness which seemed lately to have been born in her. “Shall I get some eau de Cologne and bathe your forehead?”

“No, thank you—oh no!” I answered, struggling to a standing position. “I shall be dressed as soon as you, Gretchen.”

“I do not imagine you will,” she replied; “but that makes no difference—I will go down and try to render myself agreeable to your charming aunt.”

“She is not charming at all,” I said.

“No doubt some one thinks or thought her so,” was the calm remark; “I cannot say I do myself—on the contrary rather.”

It was not necessary to pursue the subject, so I allowed it to drop, and Gretchen and I proceeded to make our toilettes in silence. Before we had completed them, however, we heard Herr Droigel’s voice marvelling if his “vain children” meant to descend or not.

“I am coming,” cried Gretchen, adding as she ran downstairs, “as for Annie, she wanted to go to bed and never get up again. Her head is—as you might have anticipated.”

“Ah! ah! ah! ah!” moaned the Professor. “My Annie beloved; what a slight, slender scabbard holds the sword of her genius! I was wrong: we must no more of this—no more.”

After which byplay between father and daughter, each word in which was heard by Mrs. Isaac and my uncle, Droigel en-

tered his drawing-room and the door was shut.

When I joined the party, all eyes turned on me—some curiously, some anxiously.

“Come near to me, pale-face,” cried Herr Droigel, rising and offering me an easy-chair close to his elbow, “I want to look at you ; I want to know how you repay me for granting a whole nine hours of holiday. Ah ! ah ! cheeks white, eyes heavy, limbs weary, hands nerveless—no, no, Miss Annie, holiday-making is very well, but health is better, and if you cannot maintain health you must not make holiday.”

At which speech Jemima Jane laughed, and Mrs. Isaac looked disgusted.

“It seems like new light through old windows to hear of Annie being delicate,” she observed.

“I think she gives way a little sometimes,” added Madame, which speech so utterly astounded me that I dropped a

flower I was holding, and looked at Herr Droigel's wife in blank amazement.

“And I think we had better have some tea,” said the Professor. “Here, you dear sir, you good uncle, take charge of your niece. She is like one of those flimsy papers of Threadneedle Street: she is of not much bulk, but she is of value.”

“As that dreadful man from the City whom Dellaro introduced the other evening said, ‘There are notes and notes—bankers and bankers,’ ” I observed, trying to make myself agreeable.

“When I was young,” remarked Mrs. Isaac, in a tone intended to imply everything had been right at that period of the world's history, “we were taught at school it was the height of rudeness to speak of people by their surnames.”

“Perhaps, aunt, you had not so many people to talk of in those days as Herr Droigel and I have now,” was my reply. We are told a worm will turn. It seemed

to me at the moment I had endured a considerable amount of trampling from my aunt, and the sooner I began to turn the better.

After tea we relapsed into that state of apathetic dulness, of respectable stupidity, from which the meal had roused us.

Tea is no doubt a comfortable and invigorating beverage, but it has no power to obtain fire from flint, to strike conversational sparks from stones.

Very different was our talk from that of the happy evening before. We were as oil and water, our ideas would not mix and mingle.

Herr Droigel and my uncle, and Gretchen and I did our best, but the spirits of the party seemed to lie under a cloud. Mrs. Isaac was cross. As she would herself have said, "We were not of her sort," a grievous sin in her estimation. We were not rich enough or grand enough to impress her; we were not sufficiently poor and humble to be patronized. Even Gretchen, of whose

dress, manners, deportment, and general appearance she had in the earlier part of the day conceived a favourable opinion, had, by some means “got out of her good books.” True, she praised everything about the girl to Madame—everything, from her plaits to her sandals, but that was only done the better to depreciate me. It is not enough to state a person to be positively contemptible: the effect of detraction is always increased by erecting a visible standard of excellence in comparison to which he is shown to be relatively contemptible as well; and for some reason best known to herself—not attributable to modesty, I am certain—Mrs. Isaac refrained from measuring me with my cousins.

As for the girls, the absence of “beaux”—as Jemima comprehensively styled all eligible men—had the effect of reducing them to absolute silence. Whilst parading about the streets they seemed to me gifted

with a very Niagara of words. They talked loud and long, they uttered remarks for the benefit of the passers-by. They giggled and laughed till even their mother was occasionally roused to remind them "They were not in Fairport;" but now a spirit of dumbness seemed to have taken possession of them.

They looked at illustrated books, and stared wearily out of window, answering Gretchen in monosyllables, and scarcely brightening up under the influence of Herr Droigel's outrageous compliments.

After we had sat thus for a little while, my uncle went away to call upon some one who was not to be seen except after seven o'clock, and, relieved of his scrutiny, the two girls began to whisper together, break-out at intervals into smothered giggles, when the confidences exchanged grew specially amusing.

"Bad, bad! not well-bred," was Herr Droigel's commentary on them after our

visitors were gone ; whereupon Madame answered, "I see it not ; girls will be girls. It is not fit they should always conduct their manners like women grown up."

From which remark I inferred Madame thought that some one conducted her manners improperly.

Could it be me ? I was growing uneasy at an undefined change in her mode of speaking of and to me. For years she had been, if not a good mother to "her Annie," at least as good as it was in her power to be to any one.

She never made me feel that in her affections I stood second to Gretchen—never allowed me to see I was less dear to her than her own child—never until that unlucky occasion when I expressed my opinions concerning Mrs. Isaac.

What was there—what could there be so admirable and so super-excellent about that woman, to render one guilty of high treason if one disliked her ?

“She is detestable.” I said those words to myself as I looked at her talking to Madame.

The judgment of my childhood remained unchanged after the lapse of all those years ; and her judgment of me remained unchanged also—I could feel it.

I knew she hated me for my success—just as she would have hated me for failure—had I failed. She grudged me the friends sent to me by Heaven—the reputation already achieved—the power of making money ; she hated me for Being, as I had said long before concerning Mrs. Daniel. In the scheme of creation I was in her opinion a supernumerary, and a pernicious super to boot. If I had been ragged, and begging my bread, I do not think she would have pitied me ; if I had been a Duchess, she would have thought and said the position had been obtained by cunning and deceit.

So long as I was living, I could do nothing

right in her eyes—even if I died, I felt certain I should die in some manner objectionable to my aunt—and thus my thoughts ran on till interrupted by Mrs. Isaac suddenly inquiring—

“Annie, are you not going to give us a song?”

Now this was one of the things I had determined I would not do. If she liked to take tickets for any concert at which I was to appear, and see me well dressed, and amongst other artistes, well and good; she might hear my “wild notes” to her heart’s content or discontent; but sing to that woman and her girls in our drawing-room, in cold blood, I felt to be an impossibility.

“You must excuse me,” I therefore answered, “I cannot sing to-night.”

“Oh, that’s all nonsense; you are not a child now, pretending to be shy; you are grown up and as tall as you ever will be, and singing is your business.”

“Only when I am paid for it,” I

said, laughing to conceal my irritation. "Seriously, aunt, I should be most happy to do what you ask, but the fact is, I cannot sing without the gaslights and the clapping."

"Well, I'm sure!" ejaculated Mrs. Isaac.

"Admirable!" cried Herr Droigel. He always accented the *mi* syllable, and so gave this word quite the effect of an exclamation.

"Admirable! You learn, child."

"The remark is not original," I said, demurely, "I have only adapted it."

"A timely adaptation is almost as useful and quite as amusing as an original remark," Gretchen observed.

"But are you serious in saying you will not sing for me?" asked Mrs. Isaac.

"For 'will not,' read 'cannot,'" I replied. "It is a fact that if I were to try and sing now, I should probably not be able to get out a note."

"Well, yours must be a strange sort of

voice," remarked my aunt. "Now, there are my girls—of course, I don't mean to say either of them is as clever as you (this was sarcastic), or has had the advantages showered upon you (this was envious), but I'll be bound you would never hear any excuse like that you have just made come out of their lips. They have been taught, poor dears! to make the most of their small abilities, and I call that better and more Christian-like than to have great abilities and not to be able to use them half time—you remember the parable of the talents?"

"It is one frequently quoted—so frequently that one is in no danger of forgetting it," I replied. As my aunt observed subsequently to Gretchen, "the loss of her voice does not seem to have affected her tongue." "Jemima," I added, "will you be Christian-like, and sing something for us?"

Jemima hesitated.

"Come, come, don't you be turning shy,

Miss!" exclaimed Mrs. Isaac, in high delight at the prospect of hearing one of her young screech-owls hoot. "Hold up your head, and let Herr Droigel see what you can do. She wants no notes, thank you, Annie. My girls," she said, turning to the Professor, "can sing anything if they hear it once."

"What a marvellous faculty!" exclaimed my master.

"And they can learn a tune as easily by hearing it as anybody else can learn it from the music," pursued Mrs. Isaac, warming with her subject; "but that they get from me."

"Ah, how good, how fine!" exclaimed Herr Droigel. "Whenever we meet genius, we must go back to first causes—the mother, it is she, it is from her——"

"I don't believe now Mr. Motfield could turn a tune if it was to save his life," continued Mrs. Isaac, encouraged by the Professor's interest and admiration.

“Yes, yes ; but is it not that as I say just now ? It is the mother—it is——”

But at this point the conversation was interrupted by Jemima Jane. Spite of her mother’s statement, she seemed to prefer having music before her, and had selected a song, then not long published, which by reason of its extensive popularity soon found its way even to remote towns. The same words have, I think, been set to one if not more airs, but Jemima’s interpretation stamped that special composition into my memory.

I offered to accompany her, but my aunt promptly negatived that suggestion, evidently thinking I might cause her daughter to break down. Clearly there was no wickedness of which she did not secretly consider me capable.

Miss Motfield began. She may have been able to play correctly without notes, but she could certainly not play correctly with them.

Tum-ti-tum-ti, tum-ti-tum-ti, Tra la la, La la la la. Thus the symphony, and certainly every third note she played in the bass was wrong. I saw Droigel pull one agonized grimace, and then compose his features.

After clearing her throat with a little suggestion of a cough, half apologetic, half assertive, she uplifted her voice :—

“ Meek and low-lee—pure and ho-lee.”

(The lee falling on a high note.)

“ Chief”—this word with great emphasis and decision ; “ among”—slurred, as being of no particular account ; “ the blessed three”—*staccato* and *rallentando*.

“ Moving sad-ness ”—sadness completely dissevered, so as to enable the singer to deliver “ ness ” to us with all the force of her lungs—“ into glad-ness ”—“ ness ” again particularly prominent.

“ Heavenborn art thou—Cha-ri-tee.”

To describe the shock the first line gave me would be simply impossible. During the whole of my residence in London I had been with people who either sang not at all or who sang fairly well. The little family gatherings which till lately constituted our wildest dissipation, were attended principally by Droigel's compatriots, and although I never took kindly either to the German language or to the German style of singing, still the music was exquisite, the time admirably kept, the harmony perfect.

Of that fearful and horrible thing inflicted upon a number of suffering guests by young ladies and middle-aged ladies, who say with a sweetly conscious smile and simper, intended to be modest and attractive, that they "sing a little" I had no experience. When I left school, I left behind me also the feeble wailings of British incompetency, and therefore while I expected to find Jemima's performance bad, I was utterly unprepared for the depths

of musical, or rather non-musical depravity which she sounded.

I looked at Herr Droigel—Herr Droigel looked at me; then we averted our eyes and kept them studiously out of range, while Jemima, serenely confident in her own strength, continued her song.

Where she got to whilst informing us

“Pity dwelleth in thy bosom,
Kindness reigneth in thy heart,”

I have literally no idea; but she began to right herself at the picture of “Gentle thoughts alone can,” and came safely to land on “Sway-hay thee,” which was more than I expected, and triumphantly delivered herself of

“Judgment hath in thee no-ho part.”

After that it was plain sailing for one line,

“Meek and low-lee, pure and ho-lee ”

being repeated, and the whole ending with a defiant flourish on the words—

“Turning sadness into gladness,
Heavenborn art thou, Cha-ri-tee ;”

succeeded by a symphony consisting of a series of short runs laboriously executed that pulled up at intervals with tum-tum, and then recommenced for all the world like a baby trying to walk ; after which Miss Motfield commenced the second verse—and—finished it.

I do not know exactly what I said when all aglow with the consciousness of having executed a difficult task perfectly, and slightly out of breath with her exertions, Jemima rose from the music stool and left the astonished piano to recover its senses. I know I must have uttered some fib, and managed to speak it like truth, for both the performer and her mother looked delighted.

Involuntarily Herr Droigel uttered something like a paraphrase of that famous speech made by a bishop, who by it saved a routed audience from utter confusion—

“The next time, Miss ——, you say you cannot sing—well, we shall know how to believe you——.” But before Jemima left the instrument he had recovered himself—

“It is marvellous—wonderful,” he said, rubbing his great hands together as if in an ecstasy. “Thank you, Miss Jemima—so much. Has the other sister, Madame—your second charming daughter—a talent similar?”

Mrs. Isaac did not know—she believed—that was she had been told—friends kindly said—but then friends might be prejudiced—that a musical strain ran through all her children.

“You should hear Tommy sing the ‘British Grenadiers,’” she added, addressing me.

I said I should like very much to hear that inspiring song sung by Tommy, and Herr Droigel hoped we might some day have that pleasure. It may be mentioned here that we had.

Meanwhile Jemima's sister was waiting in a fever of anxiety to be asked to emulate the doings of the last performer, and noticing this, Gretchen good-naturedly led her to the piano.

“Do you prefer to accompany yourself?” I asked, notwithstanding my previous rebuff.

“Yes, thank you,” she replied; “I always play my own accompaniments;” which was satisfactory, as no blame could in that case be attributed to me.

Without the slightest prelude she commenced, played a false note—another, and yet another. Crimson with mortification, she uttered an impatient “Ah!” and tried back, making this time a fair start.

“One moment, please,” cried Herr Droigel; “ten thousand—ten million pardons, dear Miss—but what is dat?”

“‘Adelaïde,’” I replied, seeing that my cousin had not the faintest conception of what it might be he wanted to know.

“Ah! not that song,” he exclaimed; “no, no, not dat. The fact is,” he went on, turning towards Mrs. Isaac, “I cannot bear the painful thoughts it recalls. I have bitter memories — heart breaking — connected therewith. It wrings my soul, even that one bar. Dear, dear Miss, forgive, and favour us with something as charming but possessed of no recollections. Ah! happy, happy spring time,” he continued, looking at the two girls, “that has no past—which is all present and future. You forgive, dear Madame, you who perhaps can out of the depths of your own experience understand my feelings a little;” and he stretched out his hand to Mrs. Isaac, who took it and would have been mightily puzzled what to do with it afterwards had not the Professor after a tender pressure withdrawn his fingers.

The young lady, who was ambitious, substituted Schubert for Beethoven, and favoured us with *Der Wanderer* in English.

It did not matter in the least. If we were to have it at all, the language could make no difference. She had a better voice and played more correctly than Jemima, but with all—ye gods !

When the evening was over and our visitors were gone, Herr Droigel came to me.

“Sing, Annie, sing, for the love of Heaven—take that taste out of mine mouth—those sounds out of mine ears. Ach, mein Gott ! what has thy Droigel done—what sin has he committed that he should be so tortured ?”

What Herr Droigel’s god may have answered I know not ; certain it is, however, the Professor was soon restored to his accustomed equanimity.

As I have said, he had a special idol of his own whom he chose to address as a deity, but which was to me a perfectly unknown god.

Perhaps it was a goddess, and her name Self-Interest.

I forgot to mention that whilst that little interlude concerning 'Adelaïde' was in progress, Gretchen left the room.

"I thought I should have gone into hysterics," she said to me subsequently.

So far as I was concerned, I wonder I did not.

Said Madame before we retired to rest—

"Dey did deir best."

"Mine Gott!" remarked her husband, once again addressing his personal deity, "if dat be deir best, vy do dey do at all?"

In my opinion a most pertinent question.





CHAPTER VI.

PREVISION.

AFTER that evening I saw little more of my aunt or cousins during their stay in London, greatly to Gretchen's and my contentment, and to the maintenance of peaceful relations between me and my kindred.

On any more expeditions, whether with a view to business or amusement, Herr Droigel set his veto.

“It vexed his very soul,” so he expressed himself to Mrs. Isaac, “to have to assume a character despotic, not to say brutal, but he knew that bad health meant bad voice, that fatigue meant bad health. No, he must interdict ; Annie had still some more songs to sing in London—not many, fortunately,

but enough—and after that she had to make her little tours. Would — could dear Madame Motfield ever forgive the savage nature poor Droigel was forced to exhibit?”

To which dear Madame Motfield replied, with a charming candour, that she not only forgave, but pitied. For her part, she thought he was a very kind gentleman, but sorely put upon ; and further, she felt, as usual, very thankful to the Almighty it was no child of hers—no one, indeed, who could be called a blood-relation to her—who gave way to airs and graces, and made herself a trouble to everybody she had anything to do with.

Which speech Herr Droigel acknowledged with a bow and smile of such complete innocence that it left my aunt in doubt whether he grasped her meaning.

“Of course a foreigner cannot be expected to understand like an English person,” she remarked to her daughters, in

a tone of self-conscious superiority. But Herr Droigel understood well enough.

“She would have liked thee to be her drudge, is it not so, Annie?” he asked; to which I answered—

“I think not. She would have liked me in no capacity.”

“Never mind; thy way lies different,” he said, to comfort me, as though I stood in need of comfort.

“We certainly could not travel the same road long in company,” I remarked, and then the matter dropped. Mrs. Isaac was not a tempting subject on which to enlarge.

Within a day or two Jemima’s *futur* appeared on the stage, and then there was much lamentation over the purchases which had been made so precipitately. The young man came up to town armed with letters of introduction to heads of departments in City wholesale houses, and Mrs. Isaac’s opinion was that he could have

bought the wedding-dress for one-half the money—just one-half.

Being subsequently favoured with a private view of some of the articles obtained per favour of Mr. So-and-so, I am, however, inclined to think my aunt was slightly deceived in the City as well as at the West End, and that Jemima could have provided her trousseau at dear old Mrs. Nelson's, better and cheaper than she did in London. For one mercy I was thankful, however—we had not to go into the City with them. Herr Droigel refused his consent, as has been stated, whilst Gretchen flatly declined to make herself a party to such an excursion.

The labour those people went through ! They issued forth at unheard-of hours. They did the Tower, Greenwich Hospital, and St. Paul's in a forenoon. They would stay out all day in a blazing sun, and then finish up at the theatre at night.

We did our best : we sent them tickets,

got them orders, and made them presents—at least we made presents to Jemima Jane. Gretchen gave her a very pretty inlaid writing desk, Madame a card-case, I a brooch which for gorgeousness of setting and brilliancy of colour might have delighted the heart even of Mrs. Daniel Motfield ; whilst Herr Droigel presented her with a Church Service bound in velvet, the form of Solemnization of Matrimony in which he with ponderous jocularitv recommended her to commence studying immediately. Whereupon the intended bridegroom remarked he believed she knew it off by heart already, for which pleasantry he was rewarded by a playful slap from his fiancée, and then the pair expressed a hope that when they were married and settled we would all come down and spend a few weeks with them.

“Of course Fairport is very different from London,” added Mrs. Isaac ; “but it is considered healthy, and the gentry come from far and near to stay there for the

benefit of the sea-bathing. We will all do our best to make you comfortable. We may 'not be fine folks, but we are true ;' which statement Herr Droigel received with appropriate comments, and having assured the dear lady of his devotion to her and respect for her husband and admiration for her two young lady daughters, we took our leave, the Professor hoping and trusting we might all soon have the felicity of renewing an acquaintance so charming.

The reason for these adieux, which were exchanged somewhat unexpectedly, was a sudden arrangement that the party we were to travel with should start from London at an earlier date than that at first mentioned, in order to sing at three towns not originally included in our programme.

To me the news was inexpressibly agreeable. Each morning when I awoke the idea of the same town holding me and Mrs. Isaac spread itself over my mind like a cloud. I could not sing so well because,

even although I knew how and where she was passing the evening, I had a nervous dread of her being one of the audience. The pleasure of seeing my uncle was damped because it was necessary to see her also. Since the period when her intended arrival was first announced, we of the Droigel household seemed to be at sixes and sevens. Gretchen conducted herself like one who had something serious on her mind, Madame was by turns distant and snappish, Herr Droigel walked much up and down the rooms, opening and shutting windows, whistling at intervals, and humming softly to himself.

The weather was, as I have already said, intensely warm, and that made us, I fancy, a little irritable. The prospect of getting away into the country for a short time seemed delightful—that of bidding farewell to Mrs. Isaac more charming still.

When Gretchen one day announced the tidings she had just heard, I was about

to execute a *pas seul* in order faintly to express my pleasure, when she stopped my ecstasies.

“Take it as quietly as you can,” she said. “Make believe you are not very glad—that you do not care greatly about the matter.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Never mind why. Do as I advise you, like a wise girl.”

I stood silent for a moment, then I said—

“Gretchen, why is it we all seem so different now to what we were three months ago?”

“A difficulty has arisen,” she answered. “I hope we shall have got over it before you return.”

“Is it—has it anything to do with money?” I inquired. She had talked so much to me one time and another concerning pecuniary difficulties, that I thought perhaps she was referring to some financial embarrassment.

“No, it is not money,” she replied. “It is—in a word, Annie, I don’t want to tell you what it is ; and perhaps I am wrong in my own notion altogether.”

Had she heard—did they suspect anything of my conversation with Mr. Sylvester ? As his words recurred to my mind, I felt my cheeks growing red, whilst I stammered out—

“Have—have—I done anything ?”

She looked at me curiously for a moment, then broke out laughing.

“No, Annie, you have done nothing—nothing at all events to make your complexion so brilliant in a moment. Now put the whole affair on one side, and prepare to enjoy your trip. How I envy you ! These tours must be the pleasantest part of a singer’s life.”

When the morning on which we were to start came, I felt inclined to echo with all my heart Gretchen’s sentiments. Such a delightful noise and excitement pervaded

the house. Our luggage was ready in the hall ; at the door stood three cabs ; in the drawing-room all languages known at the Tower of Babel were being uttered at once. A slight breeze stirred the curtains ; overhead the sky was blue, and the sun shining through the freshly-watered streets ; trucks filled with bright flowers yielding an exquisite fragrance, were being wheeled through the streets.

“How I wish you were coming with us !” I said to Gretchen.

“So do I, but wishes will neither saddle nor shoe the mare,” she answered.

“Now,” exclaimed the Hungarian lady formerly mentioned, who had already taken upon herself the leadership of our party, “there is no time to lose, Madame Droigel ; you know you may safely trust your husband to my keeping, and the child—no harm shall happen to her. Droigel, take leave of your wife. Annie, you come with me. Good-bye, Gretchen.” Then

kiss—kiss—it seemed as if we were all kissing each other at once. A minute more and we were waving our handkerchiefs in answer to other handkerchiefs waving from the windows, till turning round a corner waving was no longer possible or expedient.

“How happy you look,” said Madame Szeredy, addressing me. “You will not wear so pleasant an expression a month hence when you find how we all can quarrel and how I can scold.”

It is not my purpose to give any detailed account of that tour, which, spite of daily bickerings and a perpetual war of differing opinions, seemed to me then, and seems to me now, to have been one long bright holiday. Charming and fresh as everything appeared to my imagining, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to give an idea either of its charm or freshness to the reader. The world was young for me then ; I had no responsibility or anxiety. If I did my part well, I was patted and petted ;

if I did it ill, the reproaches poured upon me neither broke my bones nor hurt my heart.

One hour I heard I was a creature too wicked, too debased for Madame Szeredy to be able to find words adequate to express my vileness ; the next I was a dear good girl whom it was a pleasure to instruct, who set an example of conscientious study to persons old enough to know better.

After all, there can be no question but that maledictions uttered in a foreign tongue have a piquancy and assume a degree of harmlessness impossible if spoken in one's own. I do not think I should have liked to be called a beast, a fool, a fiend, a brute, a demon, an impostor, a devil, in English, and yet it never disturbed my equanimity to hear those expressions hurled at me in French, German, or Italian.

When, however, any mishap occurred in which several persons were implicated, and mutual recriminations began, I used to put

my fingers in my ears and sit in that attitude till the hurricane should have subsided.

No scolding in any opera I have ever heard approached the absolute sublimity perpetually attained by our party. They all screamed out at once ; they declaimed, they gesticulated, they shrieked forth invectives, they shouted anathemas, they thrust clenched fists into each other's faces ; they stormed, and, looking like fiends, would fling disdainful glances over their shoulders at a vanquished foe.

Then almost in a moment the tempest lulled, and half an hour afterwards they would be laughing round the supper or breakfast table as though there were no such thing in this world as difference of opinion, with its concomitants, anger and rage and all uncharitableness.

Looking back, I must say there is something marvellous to me in the apparent innocence, in the thorough light-hearted-

ness of the party in which I am now aware I was the only person ignorant of the world's wickedness, its pitfalls, its vice, its misery. Not a woman among those who seemed never to have existed for or thought about anything except their art and amusement, but had a story in her life—a story no one would desire to hear or tell; whilst the experience of the men must have out-Heroded theirs; and yet I declare, wide as has been my acquaintance with artistes, I have heard no word pass their lips at which Virtue need to hold up its hands in horrified surprise; I have listened to nothing calculated to offend the taste or jar against morality.

I know now what the morality was of those with whom I travelled. I understand the pitiful story of sin and sorrow each could have recalled, or was enacting; and yet no children out for a holiday could have been more innocent in their ways, their talk, their doings.

Schoolboy tricks were rewarded by peals of laughter, practical jokes which at ten years of age I should have considered beneath my dignity were performed at the expense of each and all. I cannot wonder at staid English landlords and landladies being scandalized at our frivolity, and talking disparagingly about "them furriners." Sometimes for the honour of our art I wished we could have adopted manners and a style of life more quiet and conventional, and ventured one day to bring out this notion for Herr Droigel's contemplation.

"Yes—yes," he answered. "Good—very good; but then my Annie must remember respectability means stupidity, dulness, stagnation. We might get good voices out of those materials, but good singing never. Why, you already sing quite differently to that which was your manner when you saw no life but that of poor Droigel's home circle, when you heard nothing but humdrum, when your food was child's food,

and your experience less than that of any schoolgirl. The artiste nature lives but in the sunbeams of excitement—it withers, it dies in the shade of a semi-stagnant existence.”

What he said was true, and at that moment, spite of my timid scruples, the life on which I had elected to enter seemed very fair.

It appeared to my fancy like a broad smooth river, fringed with flowers whereon were gaily-painted pleasure barges filled with laughing, light-hearted passengers. Music floated over the waters, sweet sounds rose and fell, the voices of singing men and singing women keeping time and tune to the melody of the dipping oars.

Out of some of those old story books at Lovedale I had gathered this allegory doubtless, but it came to me then with all the charm of novelty.

This was what I had been longing for all my life; there lay the happy river,

already I saw the place reserved for me—a place of honour. I could make more than a success, leave something behind me more than the memory of a song that is sung. I had it in me to achieve Fame. I knew it, I felt it, and yet at the very moment I was longing to set sail, an indefinable misgiving seemed to keep me tarrying on the brink.

The latter part of that dim old story held most probably a moral, for there came to me a vision of a sea beyond the river, of dark, stormy waves, a murky sky, boats riven asunder, men striving, women shrieking. My sleep became uneasy, and I dreamt of that scene more than once. Sometimes I was gliding along easily, quietly, the cool water laving my hand, which hung over the gunwale of the boat; but however my voyage began, it always ended in confusion and anguish. I clutched ropes attached to nothing, which came away in my fingers; I held on to oars that slipped out of my

feeble grasp ; I tried to cry aloud, but my voice fell back into my heart in a dead silence. In the distance I beheld my grandmother, and strove to reach her, but the more I tried the more the raging billows bore me from her.

I used to wake trembling and afraid, but the bright light of the summer morning restored my courage, and with the sun shining into my room, I have had the sweetest, most refreshing sleep—sleep which gave me new life and energy.

Fact was I had no leisure through the day to remember my dreams, and at night I was too tired to fear them. We worked hard, all of us : we had to rehearse with the members of provincial societies ; the local musicians had to be drilled, and denounced, and encouraged.

Our greatest trials were with amateurs.

“ Accursed be the people who, knowing not how to play or sing, will persist in playing and singing,” said Madame Szeredy,

only she did not say it in English. "Oh ! what a country is this, where, though they have eaten of the fruit, they cannot yet discern good from evil."

"They think evil—good," explained Herr Droigel. "They understand not art ; they distrust it."

"Strangers are generally distrusted," said Madame Szeredy, "and no greater stranger, in English eyes, could land herself on Albion's shores than Art."

"That is right," exclaimed Herr Droigel. "I was once at a concert when Serlini sung. I had a ticket for the best place sent me by her, and I sat amongst a number of people the most respectable, of the most fashion. Well, the singing of all was divine, and yet the audience near me seemed cold until—would you believe it?—that once famous Mrs. Edmonds, that once British favourite, now in heaven—that cow—that iceberg—that woman with the big eyes and a mouth which opened as a grave, came for-

ward, when she was greeted—ah! yes, she had a reception if you like. Said a comfortable madame, who had, mistaking me for somebody with a position, done me so great honour as to borrow my glass, ‘Now we shall hear something pleasant. Give me singing like Mrs. Edmonds’. She is a good wife and mother, I am sure; very different from those foreign women.’”

“Madame,” I made reply, “could you not see plenty of good wives and mothers without paying half-a-guinea for the pleasure?”

“Ah! yes,” she said; “but it makes one feel so much safer when one knows that the private character of a singer is beyond suspicion.”

“Mein Gott!” I exclaimed; “it makes not me feel safe. I know Mrs. Edmonds will murder that poor innocent song—slay it as Herod did the children. Better would it be if she stayed at home with her babies. Wherefore my fine lady returned my glass, and turned her back on me.”

“Did she imagine then,” I asked, “that Madame Serlini, because she sings so gloriously, could be other than a good wife and mother?”

Swiftly the Hungarian shot a glance at Droigel.

“She knew nothing about Serlini,” he answered. “How should she, wrapped up in her proof armour of pride and prejudice? Serlini is the best of mothers; tender, faithful, as she is beautiful.”





CHAPTER VII.

MR. FLORENCE.

WE remained for nearly a week in Birmingham, giving two concerts to the inhabitants of that musical town, and receiving much kindness and attention during our stay.

Whilst there we visited all the celebrated places within reach. With my own eyes I beheld Kenilworth, and was not disappointed; we roamed through the old streets of Warwick—saw the Castle—sat down on the grass to contemplate Guy's Cliff at our leisure—and from the low wall beside the Avon looked upon the stream which had rippled past in Shakspeare's time just the same as it did in ours.

Not, however, to emulate the descrip-

tions contained in local and other guide-books do I chronicle these facts, but to introduce easily a circumstance which did not much impress me at the time, though it subsequently assumed more important proportions.

At Birmingham Mr. Florence called on our party, and joined us in several of the excursions I have mentioned.

Not frequently—half a dozen times, possibly—I had seen him since the evening we first met at Sir Brooks's. We perhaps exchanged a few words on each of these occasions, but acquaintanceship of any kind with him I had none.

It was different, however, I soon found, with my companions. They knew him well—they had old associations with the same places and the same people—former memories concerning which they discoursed—over which they laughed.

He had been staying with some family in the neighbourhood, but now he left his

friends, whoever they might be, and taking up his abode in the town lived almost with us.

Moreover, where we went he went also ; sometimes travelling in our company, sometimes preceding our party, sometimes following it ; but always appearing in a front seat at our concerts, and joining us at supper afterwards.

We had only two more towns to visit after leaving Birmingham, and we gave but one concert in each. I am glad now to remember our party broke up before the first dread and trouble inevitable to one in my position assumed a definite shape.

I like—I have always liked—to think of that almost unclouded time of holiday-making. It gave me a kindly and familiar feeling towards artistes that I shall never lose, spite of all their sins and shortcomings.

During our tour I grew to regard them as beings not quite responsible for their ac-

tions, and even now I often wonder if that impression be wrong—if the line and plummet which may accurately enough define the right and wrong of an ordinary human being can safely be considered to indicate the mental, moral, and physical status of those who, having the genius of gods, retain the minds of children and the uncontrollable impulses of savages.

Let me recall one last incident of our travel. All the singing was over, but we had agreed to spend another Sunday in company. Arriving the previous evening at a small seaport town, famous for the number of Dissenters it contained, and the beauty of the scenery surrounding it, we had planned to take a long drive on the following morning, to eat our luncheon on the hills, and return to a late dinner—Madame Szeredy, who knew the neighbourhood, agreeing to conduct us to a desirable point of view, and bargaining that she should be permitted to attend to the commissariat.

With this arrangement we were all pleased. We knew her judgment in scenery to be as perfect as her judgment in music ; and her taste in eating and drinking to be, if that were possible, more perfect than that in either of the former.

The love of English people for the pleasures of the table has almost passed into a proverb.

To my thinking, the English as compared with foreigners are satisfied with simplicity itself in the way of food. They seem to me very anchorites when, remembering the ordinary bill of fare of a British gentleman, I recall the feasts ordered and eaten by the inhabitants of other countries.

Certainly since our departure from London we had lived on the fat of the land. Madame Szeredy left nothing to chance—trusted “no future, howe’er pleasant,” in the matter of food. A cook preceded us, as did also wine—an arrangement being, I presume, made with the several landlords which reconciled them to the presence of

the one and their guests' consumption of the latter.

London, or Paris, or Vienna, or whichever great capital may be considered the headquarters of good living, we took with us. We carried metropolitan ways, manners, conversation, into the country. We had foreign breakfasts, at which we drank claret and ate mutton chops, refreshing ourselves afterwards with rare fruits—peaches, grapes, nectarines, and so forth. Our dinners were generally light repasts—supposing we had dinner at all, which rarely happened during our tour, except on Sundays—but the suppers!—pen and ink cannot depict the variety, quantity, and quality of these repasts.

No wonder, considering the extravagance of our living, the gorgeousness of our attire, the tempers in which we indulged, the marvellous petty and unnecessary meannesses of which we were guilty after having perhaps the moment before sense-

lessly squandered pounds, the free manner in which we spoke of Heaven and the devil—words which, though rendered in a foreign tongue, were intelligible enough to the understanding of inn-keeping respectability—that we were regarded wherever we tarried with a mixture of contempt, distrust, and dislike, which gave rise to wonderful *contretemps*, and tended in no small degree to heighten the amusement and excitement of our tour.

It has struck me since, we were all of us much happier and more agreeable on the days when work had to be attended to in the evening than when left utterly to our own resources.

We delighted in the idea of having nothing to do ; but when the time came in which nothing was to be done, we either spent it in gambling or quarrelling.

Never was Madame Szeredy's tongue so effective in vituperation or complaint as

on those rare occasions when we were neither travelling, nor rehearsing, nor singing.

Judging from our party, I should imagine the whole of Satan's existence must be passed in finding evil words, works, and pastimes for idle artistes.

Were the weather too warm to go out, we hated each other after the first half-hour of enforced companionship. Was it wet, the result was similar, only we hated each other worse. We were children, and we conducted ourselves like children. The only unhappy part of the matter was, that outsiders regarded us as reasonable and responsible beings, and were horrified in consequence by our sins of omission and commission.

It was late on Saturday afternoon when we—the "we" including Mr. Florence—arrived at our destination. For many miles that gentleman had been plaguing Madame Szeredy with an account of the reception

we might expect, the entertainment we should receive.

Home-made bread, tea, and ham and eggs—the ham salt as brine and the eggs stale—were, he declared, the only eatables for which we could hope.

“Upon his sacred honour,” he said, once when travelling in that part of the country he had been obliged to subsist for a week on fat bacon, stale bread, pure water, and the contents of a pocket flask.

“You talk without knowledge, you know not how to manage,” Madame replied; “you men are all alike, cowards to every one but your wives—content with a crust out of your own homes. Bah! I have been here too. I sent the provender forward.”

“They will not let you cook it, though,” he persisted. “To-day is in the speech of the people of this locality, ‘the preparation for the Sabbath,’ and to-morrow is the Sabbath itself.”

“Well, and what of that?”

“The landlord, you will find, objects to Sabbath——”

“Pah!” exclaimed Madame, with an accent of intense disgust. “I tell you we shall dine this evening, and to-morrow we shall have our picnic.”

The first part of her statement proved correct. Having in view, perhaps, a design of spoiling the Egyptians, the landlord consented to put his scruples aside, and allow his house to be turned upside down even on a Saturday evening; but horses for the next day he could not or would not undertake to provide.

This difficulty had, however, been overcome by Madame’s indefatigable envoy. Subject of course to her approval, he had secured a boat owned by one of the few inhabitants of the place who was not a Methodist—who was not indeed, in religious matters, of any persuasion—and it was possible to proceed to the spot selected as well by water as by land. He, the

speaker, would pack the hampers in the morning should the weather prove fine, but he had delayed doing so as several persons supposed to be learned in such matters had informed him if the wind chopped round there would be rain.

“Folly,” exclaimed Madame; “rain with such a sky as that!” and she swept her hand with a theatrical gesture towards the horizon, where, indeed, all manner of glorious tints were blended and blazing together.

After which remark of course further expostulation was useless, and Grégoire withdrew accordingly. Nevertheless I have reason to know he deferred packing the hampers until morning, and he did not pack them then.

What a lovely place that was in which Madame Szeredy had elected to pitch our tent! The best apartment had of course been engaged for us, and from the windows of the drawing-room the view was exquisite. A broad gravel walk, then a lawn

in which beds filled with flowers were cut, then far below the sea, lying calm and peaceful in the evening light.

Through the open casement came the scent of heliotrope, jasmine, and some late blooming mignonette. To the left lay the picturesque town straggling down a steep declivity almost to the shore, and to the right green hills sloped away into the sea, whilst dimly in the distance I could see that headland on the top of which it was proposed we should have luncheon on the morrow.

Before I had taken in every detail of the scene, Mr. Florence entered the room. Without turning my head I knew it was he by a particular scent he affected, which seemed a compound of violets, Cape, jasmine, and orange flowers. I disliked the perfume in those days. I detest the remembrance of it in these.

“Admiring the view, Miss Trenet?” he began.

“Yes,” I answered. My share of our few conversations had hitherto been confined almost entirely to monosyllables.

“You are fond of the sea?”

“Very.”

“Should you care to make a long voyage?”

“I do not know whether I should prove a good sailor.”

“Is that the reason you object to the proposed excursion to-morrow?”

“I have never objected to it,” was my reply.

“Pardon me—I employed a wrong word. You are not quite satisfied, you disapprove; is not that so?”

“When I was young I certainly did not go to picnics on Sunday, if that is what you mean,” I replied.

“Consequently now you are old,” said Mr. Florence, smiling, “you do not think it quite right to go to picnics on Sunday—that is what you mean?”

“I suppose it is,” I agreed.

“Then shall we refrain from picnics to-morrow and attend religious worship for the benefit of ourselves and those of our party who do not object to having the welfare of their souls attended to vicariously? How should you like that?”

“I should not like it at all,” I said, with a rude frankness for which next moment I could have beaten myself.

Mr. Florence laughed. “Great as you imply your age to be,” he remarked, “you have managed to retain one charming characteristic of youth—candour.”

“You mistake. I did not exactly mean what my words implied. What I should have said, had I stopped to think, was that whatever my feelings might be, I should not like to set myself up as better than people older and wiser than I am.”

“Neatly turned, Miss Trenet, and the truth, I doubt not; but scarcely the whole truth—rather a Jesuitical reply for so

transparent and straitlaced a little lady. I preferred, by way of a social novelty, your first answer."

I took no notice of this speech, but turned towards the window to look out at the view again.

"It strikes me," continued Mr. Florence, "that you and I do not get on so well together as we should, considering the interest with which I have watched your progress—the pleasure I felt when I knew your success was assured. The first time I began to think about you was—when do you imagine?"

"I cannot imagine."

"Perhaps you remember an afternoon, long ago, when Herr Droigel, after being at immense pains to make himself presentable to a fancied stranger, appeared at sound of my voice in—— Well, we will not particularize."

"I remember," I replied.

"And you and his daughter, hearing my

greeting, received it with peals of such genuine laughter that I longed to see you both."

I bowed my head. What could I say in answer?

"Herr Droigel explained, 'There goes my babies: they must have their laugh at the fat papa.' Being aware he had only one daughter, whom I have never seen since she was a gawky, slipshod, untidy child, with hair the colour of tow, and immense light blue eyes, I concluded the second baby must be a new pupil. Who that pupil was I learned afterwards from Miss Cleeves."

"What! do you know Miss Cleeves?" I inquired, interested for the first time in his conversation.

"Yes." He said this with the manner of one who should imply, "I know every one who can be called a 'person.'"

"She talked to me about Herr Droigel's latest acquisition. She told me how she

had first met you, informed me of all the particulars connected with your leaving Lovedale, and told me what I then considered an exaggeration—that you were possessed of a marvellous voice.”

“Miss Cleeves means to be very kind,” I murmured—feeling at once gratified and ashamed—ashamed of the rattlebrain way in which I knew she must have spoken of me to him : gratified, if the truth must be told, at the compliment implied in Mr. Florence’s words.

I did not like the man. Intuitively I distrusted, instinctively I feared him ; and yet it did please me to think he admired my singing—thought it really and truly good.

I had not been much accustomed to admiration of any kind, and I was young, and I was a woman !

“You are mistaken, I fancy,” he replied. “I do not think Miss Cleeves means to be anything, but she is a great many things by

turns as the fancy seizes her. She is certainly one of the most extraordinary young ladies it has ever been my fortune to encounter."

"She is very clever," I remarked.

"In what way?" he asked. "She is very odd, but I must say it never occurred to me to think she was clever. Clever people achieve success, or reputation, or money. Miss Cleeves will never achieve any one of the three."

I was going to tell him she might have had the last, but a thought of Mr. Sylvester and "our ladies" prevented me.

"Pity her cousin would not marry her," he resumed, finding I made no comment.

"It was the other way," I said, with a hurry I regretted afterwards.

"Was it? Very likely. Pity she would not marry her cousin; might have saved her from much trouble to come."

"Do you think there is trouble before her, then?"

“I can scarcely imagine Miss Cleeves sailing through untroubled waters,” he answered. “By-the-bye, have you seen her book?”

“No ; is it published ?”

“Yes, and—but I will not spoil its interest in your eyes ; when you return to London you shall find the volumes awaiting your perusal. We are speaking of Miss Cleeves’ literary effort,” he added, addressing Herr Droigel, who entered the apartment at this moment.

“Ah ! that Miss adorable——” began the Professor ; but Mr. Florence cut across his sentence with—

“Come, Droigel, you never thought her adorable—of that I am certain.”

“There is one thing adorable,” added Madame Szeredy, who now appeared in a demi-toilette which caused our landlady, who met her on the stairs, to uplift her hands and marvel whether the like was ever seen, what the world was coming to,

how long the Lord would keep silence, and the like—"eating after fasting. Mr. Florence, dinner is ready, and I do not intend to wait another second for any one."

Taking which hint, Mr. Florence offered his arm, and she went "like any lady"—I quote the words of our landlord—"linked with an Honourable gentleman," to the head of the table.

Ah, me! when I looked back to the old days at Lovedale, I often asked, "Can this be me? Am I the Annie of that humble home?" And yet all through the whole affair I never felt, not once, the drama a reality, I never lost the feeling we were all—spite of our dress, our airs, our splendid rooms, our tables glittering with plate, our self-possessed manners, our magnificent personal assertion—make-believes, creatures playing at being fine ladies and fine gentlemen. To me we were masquers: all the time I kept stupidly marvelling when we should throw aside our disguises, and

appear before the world in the character of ordinary mortals once again.

Sometimes when I have seen my children play at Kings-and-Queens, a strange sensation came over me. Were the king and queen, the princes and the princesses, one atom less real, though, thank God ! so much less harmless, than that little game at which, enacted by grown-up people, I once assisted ? Mr. Florence, accustomed to the ways and manners of the Upper Ten, must, I think, have found the exaggeration of dress, manners, requirements, and personal indulgence he met with amongst us toilers for our daily bread intensely amusing. If he had rested satisfied with being amused, I should not have resented the feeling ; but he sneered at the company with which he elected to mix—I could see the scoffing light in his eyes, hear the irony in his voice, detect the exaggerated deference he sometimes paid to the members of our party. Day by day I had felt an uneasi-

ness in his presence impossible to define.

He despised us, I determined at length. Why, on that Saturday night I could not form the faintest idea, and for long I lay awake trying to discover the reason.

Before I slept—the wind, as prophesied, had chopped round—driving rain beat against my windows; I could hear the sullen roar of the sea gradually lashing itself into fury over the waste of waters. I arose and looked out. The night was dark and stormy, but I could see the turbulent, restless waters, weary of calm, tossing hither and thither, deep calling to deep, and moaning mournfully for a reply.

When at length I fell asleep, it was with the cries of storm-demons in my ears, the mutterings of the great waters finding an echo in my heart.

What wonder, then, that I dreamed of that grey old church near the greyer sea?

There one monument stood out in memory before all the others, and I read again as if with my bodily sight the words graven on the time-stained marble, ending with that sentence I had conned over and over while sitting in my uncle's pew, "The Lord on high is mightier than the sound of many waters."

When I awoke, which I did very early, the rain was pouring down as though a second deluge had come upon the earth.

It was of no use thinking of getting up or picnicing on such a morning, so I turned on my pillow and fell asleep again.

With what dreary yawns the members of our party greeted each other.

Madame Szeredy openly anathematized the weather. Notwithstanding Herr Droigel's entreaties that she would reserve her indignation till the Christian waiter left the room, Madame used language concerning the rain, the climate, the besotted English fools who dwelt under such a sky,

unbefitting Sunday, or indeed any day, and the remainder followed suit. All except Herr Droigel and Mr. Florence, the former of whom besought Madame by his gods, and all other gods known even by reputation to himself or friends, to retain the calmness of her mind, whilst the latter, after maintaining a long and discreet silence, said—

“Do you not think, Madame, considering you have the misfortune to find yourself in this island, cursed by Heaven and foreigners, that it might be as well to make the best of a sad trouble, and whilst the rain pours eat your breakfast?”

Madame and her guests ate breakfast, but were not appeased. They rang for the landlord—he was at chapel; the landlady—she was at chapel.

“Bring up candles!” screamed Madame, to the astonished waiter, “all you have in the house. Pull down the blinds and shut out this ——” (here she rapped out a

full-bodied English oath which might have delighted the ears of Queen Elizabeth)
“ sea !”

Then they produced cards and played, till I, growing sick and tired of the confusion of languages, the Babel of tongues, the quarrelling, the laughing, the gambling, crept away from the sofa from which I had enacted the part of an onlooker, crept away to my own room sad at heart—oh ! sadder than words can tell.

Then I took a singular resolution for one in my position—I would go to church.

We had not breakfasted till midday, and it was quite late in the evening, nearly six o'clock by this time. Though there was still a driving rain, the violence of the storm had subsided, and wrapping a thick shawl about me, and putting on a bonnet and veil, I flattered myself I might—spite of being a stranger—pass through the streets without exciting observation. In my dark, quiet dress I slipped out of the hotel, and

made my way towards a church I had noticed as we drove along the previous evening.

Alas ! it was closed. There was no service after that in the afternoon, an old woman living in a cottage hard by told me.

“I must hear something good to-day,” I thought (Lovedale, its peace, and its lessons had stood out in strong contrast with my present life during the whole of the afternoon) ; and so thinking, I walked into the first place of worship I reached, and was accommodated with a seat.

The place was full. No doubt that to many persons was the road to heaven. I hope and trust so ; but to me, in my then state of mind, the service seemed inexpressibly wearisome.

Further, when I found our card-playing touched upon, when I heard our party held up as samples of the work of Satan, when I understood we were regarded as non-repentant Magdalenes—as women who

tired their hair and wore pillows under their arms—as Jezebels, such as she who was eaten by dogs—as those women who led even the wisest man who ever lived into evil courses, my heart sank within me. But that seemed nothing to being prayed for.

“Lord, grant,” entreated the minister, “that they may not pass from this world into eternity clad in gewgaws and ribbons and finery.”

“Amen,” shouted the congregation. “Lord, that it may please Thee these poor benighted creatures may be converted, and, seeing the error of their ways, appear before Thy judgment-seat naked and yet not ashamed, stripped of their silks and satins, their lace and their feathers, and clothed only in the robes of righteousness given out to thy saints.”

Angry, disgusted, and disappointed, I could endure no more. Groping my way like one blind, I felt my way into the open

air—no great distance, happily—and revived by the cool night air, hurried back to the hotel.

I did not re-enter the drawing-room, but hurrying upstairs, undressed and threw myself on the bed.

“Where in the world have you been?” said Madame Szeredy, coming into the room a few minutes after. “What is the matter, child?”

“I am ill,” I said. “You are very kind; but please leave me alone.”





CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNWISHED-FOR HONOUR.

FORTUNATELY future events testified to the truth of my statement.

Next day I was unable to leave my room, which signified the less as the rain continued to pour down with greater intensity, were that possible, than had been the case on the preceding morning. Many visitors came to visit me ; in a variety of tongues ennuyéd artistes compassionated my state, smothering fearful yawns the while. Towards the evening I essayed to sleep, achieving the result people who are mentally overwrought generally accomplish—that of living in slumber, a dream-life infinitely more wearing and fearful than anything reality can present.

Then suddenly I awoke, with my eyes still closed, to the consciousness that there were people in the room—people talking in whispers. One of them was the landlady.

What had gone before it is impossible to say. This is what I heard.

“She don’t look much more nor a child, does she, Margaret?”

“No, ma’am ; and yet Mr. Gregory says she can sing as well or better than any of them.”

“She looks innocent enough, lying there. Too innocent to have begun such a life.”

“I don’t think, ma’am, there is any harm in her, though she is a play-actor.”

“I hope no harm may be coming to her then,” was the reply. “I haven’t much opinion of that gentleman who is travelling with them. He has been here before ;” and then the whispers died away as the pair left my bedside.

Yes ; I had always felt intuitively there must be thorns among the roses of my life, and lo ! they were pricking desperately already.

The following morning was bright enough for the expedition proposed by Madame Szeredy ; but it was apparent to that lady's practised eyes that it would be useless to ask me to join the party.

“ You shall not get up until mid-day,” she said, with kindly determination ; “ but then if you are good and better you may come down and bid our friends farewell : they leave this evening.”

“ So our pleasant party is to be broken up ?” I said, with tears in my eyes.

“ Yes, dear. Have you found it pleasant ?”

“ Yes, indeed,” I answered. “ I like you all so much.”

“ Spite of scolding and card-playing ?”

“ Spite of anything—everything,” was my reply.

“My child, I love you,” she answered. “I wish I were not Szeredy, but a fairy who could give you ten thousand a year and place you where I should like to see you.”

She touched my lips and was gone. Ah ! Szeredy, spite of all I know now, I can safely say you hold a place in my heart a better woman would fail to occupy.

And why? the attentive and courteous reader asks, curiously.

I cannot say why. All I know is that virtuous women may often be intensely unlovable, and to this hour, Szeredy—old, worn, sceptical, cynical—is interesting to me.

The day wore on, and the party returned. Before they departed we dined. That was, I think, the saddest dinner of my life. Let them be what they might, we had been happy together, and I kissed all the women, and all the men kissed my hand in token of affectionate trust and remembrance.

I have seen somewhat of good society

since then. I have mixed with people who hold their heads high enough, and have visited and been visited by families chronicled amongst the élite of the land ; and yet were the tide of fortune to ebb and leave me stranded upon the shore of poverty, I would rather ask help—I should feel more certain of obtaining it—from one of those Bohemians whose existence the great world simply tolerates because they contribute to its amusement and excitement. Perhaps—who amongst us can tell ?—when the Great Assize comes to be held, when the nations are had up for judgment, it may chance that impulse will reckon for something both in the way of vindication and excuse—that the open hand, the generous heart will be considered as well as frail purposes, weak principles—morality strong only in opposition to the generally conceived opinions of its use.

I am not a fair critic of the dwellers in this modern Alsatia ; still I know the world .

would be a dull place but for the antics cut by those denizens of it whom Respectability strokes with one hand and slaps with the other.

They were gone, and a pleasant chapter ended with them. There remained Madame Szeredy, Mr. Florence, Herr Droigel, myself. It was Herr Droigel's intention to take a cottage in the neighbourhood, where Madame Droigel and Gretchen could join us. It was Madame Szeredy's intention to pass her short holiday with us. This I learned as I lay one evening on a couch drawn near an open window overlooking that walk mentioned as intervening between the hotel and the grass-plot cut up into beds which were filled with flowers.

I had been out on the sands, and feeling weary when I returned in the twilight, entered the empty drawing-room, and taking off my bonnet, lay down to rest ere proceeding up another flight of stairs.

Through the evening air came the fra-

grance of flowers, and mingling with it the scent of a cigar—it was not being smoked by Mr. Florence, I knew, as he had gone to visit some friends.

Soon I heard Herr Droigel's voice, and understood he was the owner of the cigar. He spoke in German, eagerly and rapidly, but it did not occur to me he was talking secrets. Had it done so, I should have moved before I understood the conversation referred to me. When I comprehended I was the subject discussed, no feeling of honour arose to urge that the *rôle* of an eavesdropper was, to say the least of it, scarcely creditable. There are various axioms on this matter, but they cannot concern me now. I heard first carelessly, then I listened eagerly, and—contrary to the proverb—did not hear much ill of myself. This was the dialogue, carried on (as before explained) in German—

“And she can do it, thou thinkest—she is capable?”

“Do it? of course she can. Capable! I repeat, Droigel, clever as we all know thee to be, thou art mistaken about her. Those great women impose on men; they accept bulk in lieu of brains. Our little maiden shall act to perfection yet, if you leave her to me.”

“But these ailments—these headaches—these reactions, I like them not at all.”

“You must take the girl as God made her, and your own absurd policy has fostered her. She has not a Southern physique, she has not Northern apathy; she is sensitive, artistic, affectionate, religious—Heavens! what a series of inconsistent qualities. You brought her up like a hothouse plant, and now when you call upon her to endure cold and hardship she succumbs at intervals—at rare intervals, however.”

“She is a good girl, and I love her.”

“Droigel, if you take my advice you will drop that absurd figure of speech; you

do not love her, you never loved anything—not even Madame Droigel—excepting yourself. Love is not a feeling which ever could find entrance into your fat soul. But others may be unaware of the fact and attach importance to words in which there is really no meaning.”

“But, dearest Madame——”

“Psha! do not ‘dearest’ me. I am not blind: I know all about your present perplexity; I know your wife is jealous—that she will grow more jealous day by day; that you are at your wits’ end to think what to do with your prize. Don’t try to deceive a woman who has seen a good deal of what the world is good enough to offer in the way of self-deception, roguery, and villany. If you could keep your baby unmarried, you would do so; as you cannot, you favour Mr. Florence’s suit.”

“I favour him! I like it not,” exclaimed Herr Droigel.

“Of that I am quite sure, but you are aware Mr. Florence is no contemptible match. Let his antecedents be what they may, he seems inclined to turn over a fresh leaf now. Further, he is in love—sufficiently in love to offer marriage.”

“I should have liked to hear him offer anything else!” hissed Herr Droigel.

“And,” continued Madame Szeredy, “he is sufficiently politic to make no terms. You have thought over the matter, weighed it, looked at it from every point of view, and you say to yourself in conclusion—it is not bad. Annie will have a protector; she will still earn money for you; she will be an ever-present advertisement, the cause of many pupils, many songs, many good bargains in the future. It is a pity the man is old enough to be her father, and many years to spare; that he has been not merely a libertine, but a scoundrel. But all mundane advantages have some drawback; and for a small person like our little

friend, without fortune, family, friends, remarkable beauty—without anything indeed except her own self—which, were I a man, I should fall in love with and marry to-morrow,—for such a little insignificant chit, I say, to secure so great a prize, is marvellous. We know some one beside whom Annie at once becomes a dwarf—mentally and physically—who would have cut off her right hand to win that regard of which this child seems absolutely unconscious.”

“She is unconscious,” said Herr Droigel; “there can exist no ‘seem’ with Annie.”

“Droigel, if I did not know you so well, I should really think you were smitten with this duodecimo edition of humanity——” began Madame.

“Do not jest,” interrupted the Professor; “I have enough to bear as it is, merely because I cannot cast out from my heart and home into this wilderness of a world

the child so guileless, who has neither father, brother, husband, nor son."

"For mercy's sake don't be ridiculous," exclaimed Madame Szeredy. "There is a man anxious to marry her—why sentimentalize?—She had better marry him and soon, if you want to keep her in the profession. My belief is, and, mark you, unless this affair be brought to a point speedily these words may come true—once this girl understands what our life really is, what we really are, she will turn from her profession in disgust; you will have seen the last sovereign Miss Trenet's voice will ever bring you in. I am mistaken if, remaining single, she would not choose to become a governess rather than remain before the public. Married, of course her husband must decide for, and if need be defend her."

"But there have been women," cried Herr Droigel, "innocent and guileless as she——"

"Have there?" interrupted Madame

Szeredy ; “ will you kindly point them out ? There have been women—innocent women, guileless, deceived, heart-broken ; there have been other innocent women deceived who lived to grow wicked and reckless. There have been women who cared for nothing on earth and in heaven but money, and who being able to get money respectably, kept respectable, and no thanks to them for it. But this child, what is she ? Like unto none of them—a poor wild bird who has for her own trouble ventured near the haunts of men. Would we could undo the past, and send her speeding back to that cottage by the Love of which I know she is always thinking when she sings, better than Serlini herself, ‘ Home, Sweet, Sweet Home.’ ” And Madame in the twilight trilled forth that melody which never seems to pall on the ear of either foreigner or Englishman.

How the conversation continued after that I do not know. I had heard enough,

though not, perhaps, too much, and fearful of detection, I caught up my bonnet and hurried to my own room.

Arrived there, I rang the bell.

“I am not so well, Margaret,” I said to the chambermaid who answered my summons. “Will you tell Herr Droigel I shall not come down again this evening?”

Half an hour subsequently Madame Szeredy stood beside me.

“Be frank, dear one,” she began. “You may confide fully in me. This malady of yours, it is more mental than physical. What caused the beginning—what reason exists for the continuance of an illness so sudden and complete? When you were working hard you never complained. Now you are idle, your head throbs and your pulse flutters. Who has vexed you—what is troubling you? If you want a friend to speak to, talk to me.”

“Thank you, Madame,” I answered; “but I do not know why I am ill, unless I

have not strength enough to lead a life of so much excitement. I have been looking back and thinking a great deal about myself lately ; and I do not think I was intended by nature for an artiste. Now I am living in it I feel like a stranger in this land, full of bustle and pleasure ; but I shall become acclimatized in time. Assure Herr Droigel he need not be afraid of my breaking down now."

She had to be satisfied with this explanation, though it was evident she came expecting a different confidence. But even had she been my friend, tried and trusted, how could I have spoken to her about my troubles ? When I strove to put the doubts which perplexed—the fears which haunted me into words, even for my own satisfaction, I failed to make out an intelligible case.

As I grew older I could surely decide for myself whether I should follow the path trodden by others or not. If Mr. Florence really wanted to marry me, I supposed I

need not accept him unless I chose. As to the fresh trial of my powers to which Herr Droigel had alluded, I guessed what it was to be, and I felt no objection to make the attempt. Concerning Madame's jealousy, the idea was too ridiculous to cause me serious anxiety. Thus I argued to myself; thus I tried to reason away the various bugbears which stood threatening me. But let me do what I would, I could not overcome the nervous terror with which I regarded my position. There seemed no firm ground anywhere on which I could trust my foot. What were those people amongst whom my future lot was to be cast? What sort of lives had they led? Why did Mr. Florence treat the whole of them with almost contemptuous familiarity? Why did he speak occasionally even to Madame Szeredy as though she belonged to some lower order of creation? I had noticed the fact from the first, and hated him for his ill-breeding.

To me he addressed very little of his

conversation ; when he did speak it was generally courteously and respectfully ; but at times, as though the force of habit were too strong to be overcome, there was something offensive in his tone and manner which I felt sting without being able to analyse in what it consisted.

Now I was beginning to understand the meaning of Mr. Florence's covert sneers and cynical amusement at the habits and modes of thought of people he evidently despised, though their careless, reckless, improvident mode of life suited his own Bohemian tastes. Yes ; I had begun to learn something of the world's ways, and that is a sort of knowledge in which the first step alone proves troublesome.

Already I comprehended the glitter of the tinsel failed to blind Mr. Florence. Sweeping dresses, gleaming jewellery, careless expenditure, wanton extravagance, could not impose on him. He took us for what we were. He could not have regarded

our doings with more sarcastic indulgence, had we been a parcel of children playing at making believe to be lords and ladies.

All the long night sleep never visited my pillow. Dreams neither disturbed nor refreshed me, for the very good reason that I remained in that territory where realism reigned supreme. I thought over my position till I was worn out with thinking; but towards morning I fell into a quiet slumber. To perplexity succeeded a great calm. I had been drifting rudderless over a strange ocean. But I would drift no longer. I had been in danger of forgetting the lessons of my childhood. I would try to recall them. I had been in the fear of seeming pharisaical—false to the creeds and traditions I was brought up to revere. But in the future I would, God helping me, enter my protest, silent though it might be, against the utter forgetfulness of right and wrong, the consciousness of which was making me miserable, not-

withstanding I lacked strength of mind to take up a decided position in the matter.

For the future I would be no shuttlecock tossed about hither and thither at the will of others. I knew now where I ought to strive to cast my anchor. I saw now where I had commenced the downward descent.

“I will try to be good,” I said to myself, when utterly tired with want of rest and long reflection I settled down to sleep; “and to be good I must be firm.”

Pity it is that threescore years and ten oftentimes find men and women ignorant of this undoubted fact.

I was scarcely dressed next morning before the landlady knocked at my door.

“Miss,” she said, giving me a letter, “this came enclosed in one to my husband, asking that it might be placed in your own hand; so I thought I would bring it to you myself.”

I took the letter; the writing was un-

familiar to me, and I should have deferred opening it but that the woman's look of undisguised curiosity warned me I had better make no mystery of the matter.

"Let me see who my unknown friend may be," I exclaimed, breaking the seal. As I read I felt the blood rushing into my face.

"No bad news, I hope, Miss," suggested the landlady. "The letter to my husband said it was most particular you should have it at once."

"It cannot be bad news to find one has a friend," I replied. "But I confess the contents of the letter surprise me."

And well it might; for the lines traced in a delicate foreign hand were as follows—

"DEAR MISS ANNIE TRENET,—I have been told that travelling in company with your party is a gentleman you met for the first time at Sir Thomas Brooks' in Park Lane. Avoid him. He is a bad man: he

fears not God. He believes not in woman. I have a tenderness for you ; but if I had not, you are young and simple. Ah ! we were all young once ! May angels watch over and protect you from the evil.

“ Ever thine,

“ LUCIA.”

Even whilst I had felt faithless, friends were thinking of me. When I returned to London, should I then require help or advice I would go to her.

“ I do not know how to thank you and your husband sufficiently,” I said, turning to the landlady, who still lingered. “ This letter has removed a great weight from my mind.”

And indeed it had. The effect on my appearance was so great that Herr Droigel greeted me as his fickle Annie, terrifying her fat papa one hour and descending upon him like a thing of light the next.

On the afternoon of the same day

Madame Szeredy and the Professor had arranged to inspect a furnished cottage which Herr Droigel proposed to take for a month in order that his wife, "for whose absence he was inconsolable, and Gretchen, who never lived save when near Annie," should join us.

From this expedition I begged to be excused. I wanted to write to Madame Serlini; I desired to have a few hours all alone to myself on the side of a certain cliff, that was accessible only from the sands; and as Herr Droigel knew to a certainty I could meet with no inexpedient friend in that out-of-the-way spot—the names of every stranger wherein he had ascertained—the pair left me to follow my own devices.

I wrote a short letter to Madame Serlini, telling her I had received her note and thanking her for it, entreating of her not to attempt to correspond with me again, and assuring her I would see her somehow

on my return to London and confide in her freely. That done, I posted the epistle myself; and, book in hand, walked on to the shore and thence over the firm dry sands to the point I wished to reach. I had noticed the steep narrow path leading up the face of the cliff on a previous occasion, but had not then been able to ascend it. Now—sometimes stumbling, sometimes tripping, always a little unsteady by reason perhaps of want of physical exercise and robust physical health—I reached a point where I could sit down and watch the white-winged vessels as they appeared and disappeared upon the summer sea.

Ah! it was very peaceful there—I could have cried for very happiness and contentment of spirit, and instead of reading I leaned my elbow on my knee, and resting my cheek on my hand thought of what I intended to make of my future. How differently I should try to act hereafter if I could only adhere to my resolutions, and

summon up sufficient strength of mind to say "No" when it seemed far easier and more amiable and more rational to say "Yes."

I had remained thus for a considerable period when I found my solitude was likely to be disturbed. From my perch I could see a gentleman making his way up the path I had followed, and a sudden turn revealed to me the fact he was no other than Mr. Florence, whom I had imagined far absent.

In my first hurry I rose to my feet, but second thoughts induced me to resume my seat. I had not expected my courage to be tested so soon. No matter; I knew it must be tried some time.

"I hope you are better," he began.

"Thank you, I am quite well," I answered.

"Madame Szeredy and Herr Droigel, both of whom I met on my way here, gave me but a bad account of you."

“I was ill yesterday—I am well to-day,” I replied.

“Changeable as the wind,” he suggested, but I made no answer; the speech was not in my opinion one that called for any.

“Do you always talk as much, Miss Trenet, as has been the case recently?” he inquired.

“Sometimes I talk more,” was my reply.

“Depends upon the listener, I suppose. You can talk to Miss Droigel doubtless?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“And to Miss Cleeves?”

“No; she does all the talking.”

“That was a pretty little place where you once lived—that ‘white cottage yonder’—of which I have heard her speak.”

The very words I had used in addressing Miss Cleeves. Clearly she must have been most graphic in her account of our first interview.

“It was very pretty,” I said; “I loved it dearly.”

“Should you wish to return there?”

“No ; all is changed.”

And I turned my eyes seaward, that he might not perceive the tears in them.

There was a pause, then he began again—

“Miss Trenet !”

“Yes, sir.” With a start I came back from Lovedale and its memories, and answered as I have said.

“Do not call me ‘sir,’” he said. (How like and yet how unlike all this was to that interview in the middle of the Love.) “I am undeserving of so formal a title.”

“What shall I call you?” I asked the question without thinking, and could have bitten my tongue out for its stupidity, when he answered as such a man was certain to answer.

“Henry, if you will be so kind.”

I did not answer—I was too angry with myself and with him even to attempt to do so ; and seeing this, he continued—

“Do not look disdainful—I assure you I did not mean to offend, and disdain is not your forte ; your type is quite different to that of a tragedy queen. There, I am transgressing again, and I do not want to do that ; I only want to talk about myself.”

“A congenial topic” rose to my lips, but I had enough sense not to utter such a sentence. I was afraid of the man. Even without Madame Serlini’s caution, without the knowledge gained on the preceding evening, I should instinctively have held myself on guard when in his presence.

He was what most persons consider a handsome man, with dark hair, a high forehead inclined to premature baldness, well-cut aristocratic features, a firm, hard, cruel mouth, and eyes that never softened or changed. I feared him. I do not think I could have stood more in dread of a tiger or a leopard. I hated and feared him, and yet he had a power over me—

the power I suppose that strong minds always possess over weak.

I was weak—the whole training of my life had tended to make me so; and yet I felt there was a battle beginning I should have to fight out almost alone.

He threw himself back against the cliff, pillowing his head on uplifted arms.

“I suppose I have been what nurses and mothers call a bad boy the whole of my life,” he began, “but I do not know, take it all together, that I am much worse than other people. The sins I committed the whole world was cognizant of. That was my mistake. If I must sin, I should have sinned *sub rosa*, kept a fair external appearance even if black as Erebus within.”

“Do you not think we had better be making our way home?” I inquired, uneasily.

“Miss Trenet, I must read you a lecture,” he said, with mock gravity; “when a gentleman gives you his confi-

dence, you should at least pretend some interest in the narrative."

"I do not feel the slightest interest, Mr. Florence," I replied; "if you have sinned as you state, I should think you would not care to mention the fact, at all events to me."

"And why not to you?"

"Because you cannot imagine the matter concerns me in the least."

"But it may concern you."

"When it does you can make your confession, if you still consider confession necessary."

"I thought I might touch your heart with a description of my uncared-for childhood, my neglected boyhood, my wild, unhappy youth, the years of my earlier manhood, that were not a whit less miserable. I forgot you had been educated in a faith which considers confession bad for the soul. Once again I beg your pardon—and will go on to say that for the first time

in my life I now see good within my grasp, if I can only manage to seize and hold it. Do you understand what I mean?"

I said "no," though I understood well enough.

"The first time I saw you at Sir Thomas Brooks's, you excited an interest in me, which from that night has gone on increasing."

"Mr. Florence," I interrupted, "I think we ought to be returning to the hotel—Herr Droigel will be uneasy at my absence."

"Sit down," he answered, laying his hand on my arm; "we must remain here until the tide ebbs, unless the worthy Professor sends a boat to our rescue—the sands were wet when I came here."

"How long will it be before the tide ebbs?" I asked. I knew, but I put the question to gain time for thought.

He had planned this—and I sat for a moment horrified at the idea of how such

a tête-à-tête might hereafter be construed to my disadvantage.

Inexperience here stood me in as good stead as experience could have done. My terror was so great that it quickened my wits, and already I had sketched out a plan of action.

“How long?” he answered, laughing at my look of dismay; “some hours probably.”

“And how deep is the water now?” I inquired.

“Knee-deep, I should say, and rising rapidly.”

I was on my way down the cliff before he had finished his sentence. If the ascent had been steep, the descent naturally proved steeper; but perfectly heedless of danger, I darted down the path. I was young, I was light, I had been accustomed in my childhood to out-of-door exercise, free and unfettered; and deaf to Mr. Florence’s entreaties and commands—his

“I implore,”—“I desire,”—I sprang down the slippery decline till I reached the water’s edge. Without hesitation I jumped in.

“My God, she will be drowned!” I heard from above—and for a moment I had to struggle to keep my position. The water was deeper than I imagined—and I, small and light, was as a cork throw in.

Only for a moment however; I caught at the cliff and balanced myself. After that I made straight for land. Sometimes under the waves—sometimes staggering onwards—blinded with salt water—sometimes standing for a moment gasping for breath—but always making my way landward.

Like one possessed I finally plunged and waded through shallower waters, and stood at length shivering and trembling on the shingle, Mr. Florence holding me with no gentle grasp.

“I trust you are satisfied now, young

lady," he said. "Next time you wish to be guilty of such another extravagance, I hope you will choose an opportunity when I am not of the company."

Had I done something very wrong—very unfeminine? Limping home in boots sodden and torn—my wet clinging skirts flapping the dust from the white hot roads—my hair soaked with water—my bonnet a mass of straw pulp. I feared I had. Mr. Florence evidently was of this opinion; for he never addressed me once after the sentence I have repeated, except when he said—"Let us go in through the garden. We need not let all the world see us in our present plight."





CHAPTER IX.

AT THE RETREAT.

MISS TRENET, will you favour me with five minutes' conversation?" asked Mr. Florence.

We had dined and we had partaken of coffee, and I, seated on a bench placed in one corner of the lawn, was looking out over the darkening sea.

I rose in answer to the request, and drawing a shawl more closely around me, prepared to pace the lawn in his company.

"We can talk here," he suggested. And when I resumed my seat, he placed himself on the bench at a little distance from me.

"I am afraid," he began, "I was very

irritable and unreasonable to-day. Will you forgive me ?”

“I do not wonder at your feeling irritable,” I replied ; “I beg your pardon for acting so foolishly, and for giving you so much trouble.”

“I deserved the trouble, and you did not act foolishly. I was wrong, I confess it, frankly. I ought to have told you the sands were wet ; but you cannot imagine how often I had tried to find you alone, and the temptation was irresistible. You were quite right, however, although it certainly mortified me not a little to see you flying from me as if I were an ogre.”

If he expected me to make any reply he was disappointed. Never, I think, was wooing conducted under greater difficulties. Perhaps he felt this, felt he might as well make a plunge at first as at last, for he said—

“I tried to see you alone, because I

wanted to ask you a simple question—this. Will you marry me?”

He took my hand; and remorseful concerning my former bad behaviour I let him keep it; not that it could be considered much of an acquisition, for it lay in his like a piece of ice.

“I do not want to marry any one,” I replied, my courage as usual failing me just when I stood in most need of its assistance.

“That is no answer to my question. I did not ask you to marry any one. I asked you to marry me.”

“I cannot marry you.”

“Why not? Do you dislike me?” he went on, finding I remained silent.

“I do not know,” I replied.

“You do know perfectly well,” he persisted; “but there, I will not torment you with questions. I will not ask you what you have heard to my disadvantage, or from whom you have heard it—why you

regard my simplest actions with distrust and fear, and shun me as if I were going to do you some grievous injury. All I will ask you now is this. Give me a chance of winning your favour. I will do my best to deserve it. If I am fortunate enough to gain your affections, I will try with all my soul and strength to make you happy. You shall sing or remain silent just as you please. You shall have everything my love can suggest or money procure. I have not been so good a man as I now wish from my heart I had striven to become, but I will be true and faithful to you."

"Oh! Mr. Florence, do not, please do not talk in that way. I cannot bear it. I feel so false listening to such words when I know it can never be—never!"

"Have you any other lover, Annie?" he asked, gently. "You need not fear telling me. If you have, and that he is worthy of you, I will go away and never afflict you with my importunities again."

“No—none,” I said, almost in a whisper.

“Are you quite certain, dear?”

“Perfectly certain.”

He had held my hand all this time. He now touched it with his lips.

When I drew it away, he said, “Forgive me.” But he came a little nearer in spite of his penitence, and began—

“As that is the case, you must in common fairness give me a chance of winning you. I do not wish you to bind yourself in any way. You have seen little of the world, and it is only right you should see more of it before you tie yourself for life. I know many people would consider I was offering you a great deal. I am rich. I am well born. As my wife you would have the entrée into the best society; but, on the other hand, I am not so stupid as to forget what you would give me in return. Your youth, your genius, a past pure and innocent as that of a child; a temper sweet and trusting as that of a saint. When I think,” he added, passionately, “of what you are now

and of what may be in store for you, I feel as if I must take you away by force and marry you to keep my darling from even the knowledge of evil."

I could not answer. I was crying at the picture so cleverly suggested to my imagination.

"Droigel told me," he went on, "not to speak to you yet. He said, 'She is still in all matters outside her art a baby. Think of the seclusion in which she was brought up before I knew her—of the convent-like existence she has led with us. I have kept her as the apple of my eye. She is a sheet of white paper.'"

"Herr Droigel does talk such nonsense," I exclaimed, laughing, in spite of myself and my sobs, at Mr. Florence's admirable imitation of the Professor's accent.

"To which I answered," continued Mr. Florence, "'May I ask you how long you expect to keep her a sheet of white paper? Do you imagine for a moment she can mix amongst artistes and remain simple as she

is now ?' Whereupon Droigel said, with a shrug of his mighty shoulders, 'There comes a time in the life of all when we say of him or her we have done our possible, the boy or the girl, the man or the woman must be his or her own fate—begin to weave the web of destiny for himself or herself. I fear not the good Gott in Himmel will see that my little orphaned Annie comes to no bad end.' "

"Mr. Florence," I asked, "if you have such a bad opinion of artistes, why do you associate with them ?"

"Formerly for the reason that habit is a strong bond ; latterly, because I wanted to see as much of you as possible. And now," he continued, "I am going to bid you good-bye. I shall be away from here before you are awake to-morrow morning. You know all I desire—all I hope. Give me as many kind thoughts as you can spare till we meet again at Fairport."

"At Fairport ?" I repeated.

“Yes; has not Herr Droigel told you? Why cannot he be frank and straightforward with you? Lady Muriel has set her heart, or that part of her anatomy which does duty for one, on getting up some operas, in which of course she is to appear; and we are all to assist in humouring her ladyship’s whim. Good-bye, child, and remember my parting words. I loved you from the first moment I saw you come forward in your black cloudy dress, with your young white frightened face to sing your little song.”

And before I even anticipated his intention he was holding me in his arms, kissing me over and over again.

This was the result of my boasted strength and courage—a victory at midday, an ignominious defeat in the evening.

I had compromised myself, and I knew it. Well, I would try to repair the error.

Hurrying to my own room, I wrote him a note which was no doubt a masterpiece

of inconsistency and absurdity, and which must, I am certain, have amused so astute and experienced a gentleman not a little.

This was the reply I received next morning by the hands of my own messenger, Margaret—

“I think I understand all you feel, and would express, better even than you do yourself. Do not grieve over the irremediable. If I may never be your husband, you cannot prevent me always remaining your friend.”

Truly it was a nice cleft-stick in which I was placed. For a few hours I felt confident in my own strength and my own courage, but now I understood I never should be able unassisted to extricate myself from the web of trouble in which I was enclosed. But for the thought of Madame Serlini I believe my spirit would have fainted away, that I should either have run off or succumbed. As it was supported by the thought that if I could

once return to London help would be near, I held up bravely, much, I could see, to the astonishment of Madame Szeredy and Herr Droigel.

Within a few days we too left the hotel and took up our abode at the cottage where we found Madame Droigel and Gretchen.

The former greeted me with a frigid kiss, the latter was affectionate as ever.

“You have had an offer, I hear,” she said, as we walked up and down the morsel of common-land which did duty both for garden and lawn.

“Who told you that ?” I inquired.

“Pa told ma, and I was present,” she replied, carelessly ; “and you refused it !”

To this statement I made no answer.

“I only wish he had proposed to me,” she went on, after a pause.

“Dear Gretchen, you cannot be serious,” I expostulated.

“Am I not !” she exclaimed. “Let Mr. Florence try, that is all. If Beelzebub—concealing, as in duty bound, his tail and his cloven hoof—came and asked me to marry him, saying, ‘I can give you carriages, horses, servants, and so forth,’ I should at once tell him to have the settlements drawn out and the licence procured. Anything to escape from my present life.”

“Has it been so unhappy ?” I asked ; “it has seemed happy to me.”

“Because you are an idiot,” she replied. “If you were not a born simpleton you would understand all this man could give you—wealth, rank, position.”

“I have no desire to quarrel with you, Gretchen,” I replied ; “so if you please we will not discuss the question.”

“Who do you suppose has the next villa to this ?” she inquired, accepting my decision with as much amiability and ready quickness as her father himself might have evinced.

“How should I know or guess?” I replied.

“Mr. Merrick’s brother-in-law. I met Mr. Merrick on the sands yesterday, and he and Mr. Waterton called this morning.”

“Is Mrs. Merrick dead?” I inquired.

“You wicked Annie!” she exclaimed. “No; Mrs. Merrick’s health is quite re-established.”

“Is Mrs. Waterton dead?” I asked.

“There never was a Mrs. Waterton; at least no Mrs. Waterton, wife to this gentleman. He is a bachelor.”

“Well, Gretchen,” I answered, “make your hay while the sun shines. Gather roses—gather roses; it is not always May.”

“Nannie, what has come to you?” she said, rubbing her smooth cheek against mine. “You are not the Nannie you were when you went away.”

“Possibly not; we all age and change.”

“Are you vexed with me?”

“No, indeed, Gretchen.”

“Or with papa or mamma?”

“No;” but this was more doubtful.

“Have you guessed what the trouble was I spoke of?”

“Yes, I know.”

“Who told you, did Mr. Florence?”

“No, Gretchen; never mind how I know, I do know that and some other things also. You remember even kittens can see after nine days.”

“I fancy some day you will hate us all.”

“I think not,” I replied; “some day I may say, ‘There is a little to forgive,’ but I shall never, I hope, forget what I owe in the way of gratitude.”

“Annie, I wonder if you know that I love you really and truly?”

“I am sure you do,” I answered. “But you do not love me one-half so well as you do yourself—which is only natural.”

“Do you love yourself?” asked Gretchen, trying to trap me.

“I hate myself,” I replied. “I am, as you said with more truth than politeness, an idiot, and I detest idiots.”

“Heyday!” cried Gretchen.

Of the days and weeks which followed I have little to tell. They were spent in almost continuous practice. To an advanced pupil like myself, Madame Szeredy proved a better mistress than Droigel was a master.

She never could or would have toiled with me through the first days of study, but now that I comprehended my art to some small degree, she was an efficient, laborious, and valuable teacher; she swore at, but she taught me; she cursed the day, the hour, the minute when she ever undertook the education of a pupil so dull, but when I had conquered the difficulty she forgot her disgust, and embracing me declared, “Couldst thou but forget everything and every one for music, there is no height to which thou mightst not aspire to climb.

There are parts in which thou shalt make a grand *furore*."

There was a great passion on me in those days for work—an intense desire for musical triumph impelling me onwards. I wanted to rise high—to do something wonderful—to prove I was strong in art if in nothing else. I desired to soar out of my present existence into some sphere where I should feel free—where I might be my own mistress, and choose my own companions, friends, occupations. Beyond all, I wished to succeed when I went to Fairport. If I made a *fiasco* at The Retreat, it would be worse for me, I vaguely felt, than my small triumph had seemed good. As Gretchen said, I was changed. Sometimes the Professor cautioned me, gently—

"Take care, Annie, take care; do not rush on too fast." But I did not heed; I abandoned my old idols and began to consort with new. Opera was for me now

all in all—I threw my heart, soul, and strength into this branch of my profession as I had never flung one of the three into ballad singing.

“Oratorios would be more in thy line,” he suggested.

“She shall do all, if you will only leave her to me,” exclaimed Madame Szeredy, impatiently; and I was left to her, whilst Madame Droigel and her husband strolled along the sands, and Mr. Waterton and Gretchen commenced a flirtation which soon advanced to love-making, and after a sufficient period ended in marriage.

It might have ended in marriage sooner, had I accepted Mr. Florence when he first asked me; that would have thrown a glory of respectability over the whole family, which at first, I fear, we all wanted in the eyes both of Mr. Waterton and his sister, Mrs. Merrick, who asked me many questions with a view of discovering “all about the

Droigels," in which endeavour she signally failed.

Was I a wretch that, after having lived for years with these people, I should turn traitor and bare the secrets of their home for her edification ?

Gretchen and she agree admirably. Gretchen has accepted the life and ideas and employments of those amongst whom her lot is cast, with an adaptability to me simply incomprehensible. Mr. Waterton never suspected she had marked him for her prey from the first moment he was introduced to her by Mr. Merrick. She told me this quite frankly, for which she was subsequently punished by many alarms lest I should reveal that fact to him, or else another—namely, that she did not care in the least for him, but loved his position more than can be imagined.

She is very fond of him now. He gives her all she wants, and her wants are many—but I should not like to guarantee the

fondness lasting if he were ruined tomorrow. I hope he will never subject her affection to that test.

Sometimes there recur to me memories of various tender passages which occurred between Gretchen and a young German to whom she fancied herself devotedly attached. They came to nothing, happily for both, and Gretchen fondly hopes I have forgotten all about his existence. It does not matter. Not a pang of jealousy shall ever disturb the rest of Mr. Waterton—whom Herr Droigel calls “that specimen John Bull husband, so kind, so wise, so rich”—if my silence can preserve him from it.

To this hour he believes Herr Droigel to be one of the most credulous, guileless, and child-like of men, and it is unlikely he will ever now change his opinion. I see no necessity why he should.

Before this person Gretchen spoke much

to me of Mr. Florence, introducing his name in a manner which would at one time have struck me as extraordinary. I was growing wise, however, and the fairy dust failed to blind me. Of my own goodwill I never spoke of him. He was never out of my thoughts, but I kept my thoughts to myself.

Just as a child going down a long dark corridor walks on silent, though tremblingly afraid of encountering a ghost, so I walked on silent, dreading the encounter with my ghost, which was indeed coming very near.

The day at length dawned. I was going back to Fairport. After years, and years, and years, I was to see the familiar houses, the well-remembered bay, the weather-beaten church, and that old monument, the memory of which always comes back fresh and vivid whenever in the darkling twilight I hear the words—

“Lighten our darkness, O Lord.”

Sir Brooks' carriage met us at the station. Time had brought a railway as well as other strange things to Fairport; and as we drove along the Parade, past my uncle's house, where I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Isaac dispensing tea to the family, my heart beat so fast I could make no answer to Herr Droigel's ceaseless chatter.

Past the church! How grey, and aged, and shrunken it looked to me, half hidden amongst the billows of graves that rose so high around! Past the house where I once heard Miss Cleeves singing "Rory O'More," and whistling to herself in the balcony. Oh! what centuries seemed to have come and gone since then. Out of the town altogether, out into the lonely country beyond, over smooth sandy roads to The Retreat.

"It is not a dream, Annie," said the Professor, as we turned through the gates and whirled up the avenue. "It is real;

and thine own voice has wrought this miracle."

"Welcome back to Fairport, Miss Trenet," said a voice that swept aside all illusions, as we stopped before the hall door, and Mr. Florence handed me from the carriage, and escorted me into the house.





CHAPTER X.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

BET Lady Muriel's faults be what they might—and spite of her divine impulses, or perhaps, indeed, because of them, the world said she had plenty—that of making her guests miserable was not one of them.

In her house all men were equal, and for that matter, all women too. Gentle or simple she treated us alike, except perhaps that for artistes rather than for her other guests she had more frequent words—that we received more gracious courtesy from her than she extended to those of her own rank in life.

That was the first time I ever stayed in a grand house, or found myself surrounded

by great people; and on the whole it did not prove so terrible an ordeal as I expected.

“This is the life, Annie. This is living,” said Herr Droigel to me, rapturously, as we wandered through the conservatories on the morning after our arrival. It was a life he revelled in. The luxury, the ease, the magnificent house, the respectful servants, the eating, the drinking, the talking, the fruits, flowers, lawns, shrubberies, delighted his sensuous, contradictory nature. He could scarcely restrain his ecstasies.

“It is this,” he said, “which is the English speciality—this country life at once so cosmopolitan and so retired—so unrestrained, and yet so refined. Ah! Annie, pity we were born only poor musicians, and not lords and ladies.”

He was amiability itself. Never had Droigel’s character appeared more simple, more infantile, more susceptible.

Nevertheless he saw everything; saw

that Lady Muriel would act only with Mr. Florence, that Sir Brooks wished us all individually and collectively at Jericho, or even a more distant bourne, saw that Lord Fortfergus was a conceited, impecunious, superficial old dilettante, whose opera——. “Ach, well,” he said; “we talk of dat no more. He will have to be sung, so we need not to pull faces.” He saw that for some reason Miss Cleeves, who was of our party, did not affect my society so much as formerly; saw that the Misses Wifforde, our ladies, were stately and disappointed women; saw, before I did, there was something amiss with my uncle; saw that even the delight of hearing Tommy shout out “The British Grenadiers,” and sing a comic song in character, failed to remove a cloud from Mrs. Isaac’s brow and restore her wonted volubility. In short, nothing escaped my master.

There was one person he could not understand, however—Miss Cleeves. He

watched her, he talked with her, he talked of her.

“That Miss, she is so droll,” he remarked to me over and over again “She baffles, she feigns, she defies.” He said this one evening to Mr. Florence, who at first only laughed in reply. They remained talking together for a few minutes; then Herr Droigel’s face clouded, and he walked out “with his thoughts” into the night.

“Miss Cleeves seems a mystery to you no longer,” I observed the next day.

“Ah, no, little one; but we must blind-fold those bright eyes. You must not grudge me my own poor pleasure. I love a mystery—to me it is as a child’s puzzle—that amuses and pains together; once put together, the pleasure is over.”

“Then you have put Miss Cleeves together?”

“Yes, and we will put her away. Amongst those great people she treats thee a trifle cavalierly, it strikes me,” he said.

It had struck me too, but then Miss Cleeves' moods and tenses were not unfamiliar to me.

The same evening she said, "I am inditing a letter to Syl. Have you any message I can convey to him?"

"To Mr. Sylvester?" I exclaimed, opening my eyes in amazement. "Certainly not." Then, thinking my words sounded scarcely civil, I added, "I hope he is quite well."

If I had been able to peep over her shoulder, and read the letter she sent, the knowledge would not have added to my comfort. As it was, I went on my way happily ignorant of the contents of that epistle.

I saw it at a later period. This was how it ran :—

"THE RETREAT,

"Tuesday night.

"MY DEAR SYL,—No doubt you have been anxiously counting the days, and watching the posts, in expectation of my

promised letter. Here it is at last, and I have hosts of things to tell you. But first, let me ask why would you not accept Lady Muriel's invitation? She says she wrote *pressingly* begging you to come, and seems rather offended at your refusal. But that is of no consequence. Nor is her Ladyship of much. She does not grow wiser as she grows older; and she has scandalized the old ladies to such an extent, they repent having accepted her invitation, and wish they had been able to prevent my beholding so much of the world's wickedness (at one time) as is to be seen in this house. I only wish I had seen as little of it as they have in any house, or rather I do not. Existence without a slight knowledge of sin is as soup without salt, somewhat insipid.

“We are a very large party, and I have enjoyed the visit immensely, the horror and dismay of our respected relatives adding not a little to my pleasure. They

asked me after Droigel had been squiring Aunt Dorothea through the gardens who he was.

“ ‘Can you tell me the name of that distinguished-looking foreigner?’ were Miss Wifforde’s words, whilst Miss Dorothea added—

“ ‘Who speaks English so well.’

“ ‘I think he is a Count Albrecht von Droigel,’ I answered; ‘I have seen him at the Dacres.’”

“ ‘That girl with the dark eyes is his daughter, is she not?’

“ ‘His adopted daughter. His own real child is as magnificent a specimen of creation as the Count himself.’

“ ‘Would you believe it? for three whole days the darlings received Droigel’s devoted attentions with that kind of amiable condescension with which English people always treat distinguished foreigners. And they went out of their way to talk to Annie—who answered—‘No, Madame’—

‘Yes, Madame’—‘Thank you, Miss Wifforde.’ You know her silly frightened way, looking ready all the while to run off and hide.

“ ‘So exceedingly shy,’ said Miss Wifforde. ‘Do you not think we have seen some lady very like Count Droigel’s daughter?’ asked Miss Dorothea.

“ ‘The same idea occurred to me,’ remarked Miss Wifforde; ‘but of course amongst the number of families we have known in our long lives we might have met with some relatives of Miss Droigel.’ And then the old darlings tripped along, holding up their brocaded skirts, and exhibiting their silk stockings, and fanning themselves, and looking as if they had gone to every ball at Almack’s in their youth, and spent the remainder of their lives in going to Court and visiting the nobility and others throughout the United Kingdom, besides frequenting all places of fashionable resort on the Continent.

“I hoped, I did hope I should be able to keep up the deception. What with their utter ignorance of the French language out of a book, and their want of knowledge of German and Italian under any conditions, I was nearly successful. Little Trenet really has improved her opportunities, and though her accent is vilely German, speaks French wonderfully fluently. And in that language I discoursed to her, whilst I held forth to Droigel—dear, fat, delightful Droigel—in German. So I meant to pass them both off as amateur musicians. I had told our aunts that abroad every Prince wrote an opera, and every Count played the violin or piano, and that every young Princess understood thorough bass, and every Countess sang from the time she was able to say whatever may be the short for Müder.

“The fact that Lord Fortfergus had composed the ineffably idiotic opera which was the *raison d'être* of our being at The Retreat,

lent a sufficient colour of truth to my fictions.

“ ‘You remember, dear,’ said Miss Dorothea, ‘that Elizabeth’s father played remarkably well on the flute.’

“ ‘Yes, and poor Lady Brooks, Sir Thomas’s first wife, composed a song called “The Nightingale,” which she published for the benefit of the Fairshire County Asylum. Somewhere at the Great House there must be a copy of it. We bought fifty.’

“ Nothing could be going on better till the night of the performance—last night—but I shudder to think of what then befell, and so hurry on.

“ Hunter summoned me from the ball-room, while for an instant I was standing still, talking to the most heavenly waltzer who ever descended to earth—Mr. Florence—with this remark, ‘If you please, Miss Cleeves, you are wanted in Miss Wifforde’s dressing-room most particular.’

“ ‘She is not in a fit, is she Hunter?’ I asked.

“ ‘She is very ill, Miss Elizabeth,’ said the stately maid.

“ Of course I at once thought about the succession, and you and myself, and whether she had made a will, and where it was, and so forth.

“ With a sad face I entered the dressing-room. ‘We shall not require you any more, Hunter,’ said Miss Wifforde. ‘You can withdraw, and close the door.’

“ Syl, they were both there in their night-caps and dressing-gowns.

“ ‘What is the matter?’ I asked. ‘I thought from Hunter’s manner you must be ill.’

“ ‘We are ill,’ said Miss Wifforde. ‘Elizabeth, you have intentionally deceived us. We have been enlightened to-night. That Droigel, your Count, is a music master, and that girl he passes off as his daughter is the grand-daughter of

Mrs. Motfield. She is an actress—she is going on the stage.’

“I spare you what followed. Little Trenet had done the thing too well for an amateur. The old ladies had their wits about them to an extent for which I was not prepared. They inquired, they heard, the curtain falls. I will draw it up to-morrow on a different scene.

“To-morrow has come, and we leave to-day. I am so sorry. I was enjoying myself to a degree perfectly indescribable. I wish I had held my peace about Droigel and that stupid Annie. The amusement obtained is not worth the price that will have to be paid. Really I am beginning to think, with our respectable relations, that it is better to have nothing to do with people who sing or play, or act or write, beyond reading their works, or paying money to hear or see them perform.

“They always get one into trouble in

the long run ; whilst as for composing oneself—— But I see you in imagination laughing at my change of opinions, so will give no further cause for merriment.

“ I made my peace with the old ladies —never mind how ; but cleverly and effectually ; and Miss Wifforde is not without hope that in the peace and retirement of the Great House, I may forget the riot and dissipation which prevail in this establishment. Lady Muriel says she is ‘so sorry we are going ;’ but I believe she is very glad. I am sure I should if I were she. Sir Thomas, as usual, says nothing, but I fancy he is sorry. The old ladies can play propriety well if they can play nothing else.

“ But if Sir Thomas could only believe it, he has not the slightest reason for jealousy now. Mr. Florence is about to be married, and the happy lady is—— I will give you three guesses. No, I will not. You shall have the delicious tit-bit

at a mouthful. The happy lady is Annie Trenet—Mrs. Motfield's grand-daughter—and she will be the Honourable Mrs. Florence. No wonder our relatives fly from The Retreat as Lot did from the cities of the plain. If any one of the trio be turned into a pillar of salt, it will be me, for I shall certainly look back with longing to the only happy time I have passed since I left London. You will come down of course to the Great House very shortly now, and I will prepare another budget of news for your especial edification.

“Yours affectionately,

“E. CLEEVES.”

“I re-open my letter to tell you Herr Droigel and his adopted daughter have just returned from Fairport. She with cheeks red for a wonder, and eyes swelled up with crying—a fright. I asked Annie what was the matter. She answered,

‘Nothing.’ I asked Herr Droigel. He replied, ‘Our Annie is a plant so sensitive.’ I asked Mr. Florence. He said he did not know, and I told him he ought to know.”

“Midnight, Lovedale.

“We have arrived here safely. We are surrounded once more by the eternal silence of this dreary house. No more dancing, no more flirting; nothing but prayers, pride, and propriety.

“Mr. Florence and Sir Thomas saw us to the carriage. I said to the former, ‘When you are married, do you think Annie will let you waltz?’

“‘I cannot tell,’ he answered, ‘but I am quite certain I shall not allow her to do so.’

“‘Miss Cleeves,’ observed Miss Wifforde, as we drove away from that delightful place, ‘you permit yourself a strange latitude in your remarks to gentlemen.’

“‘I only wish I could, aunt,’ I replied, plaintively. ‘My remarks would then be a

vast deal more amusing than they are now.' I wish I knew what Droigel's baby was crying about to-day. That name fits her to a nicety."

Miss Cleeves' remarks concerning my manner and appearance when I returned from Fairport were quite correct. I had been crying, and tears are not becoming to every one. Further, I was much vexed in mind, and annoyance is not always conducive to the maintenance of that calm which all human beings ought to preserve externally. A great trouble had fallen upon me, outside my profession, outside of Mr. Florence. Something was the matter with my uncle, and all my inquiries failed to elicit from him what that something might be. At last I bethought me of questioning Mrs. Isaac. As usual she was communicative ; for once she was civil. She thought it was quite right of me, she stated, to want to know the reason of the change

in her poor dear husband. He had forbidden her to mention the matter to me ; but there were times (many I imagine) when, in her opinion, obedience in a wife became a sin. It was very hard upon her, careful as she had always been, and saving as she had tried to be for the sake of her family.

But what was the trouble I wanted to know ? “She could not exactly tell, except that Isaac and his brother Daniel were answerable in some way for an uncle of Mrs. Daniel’s. If I remembered she had never thought much of Mrs. Daniel or her people, for all she held her head so high, and gave herself airs as if her husband’s family were dirt under her feet.”

“I did not pay much attention either to Mrs. Daniel or her affairs,” I said, finding some answer was expected, and conscious that my recollections of Mrs. Isaac’s feelings did not tally with her own report of them.

“And well it would have been for some other people if they had paid as little,” she replied; “it will kill your uncle. It is not as if even he had not paid down Jemima’s fortune, poor dear. We shall have to give up this house and sell everything, I suppose,” she added, looking ruefully at the various articles in the room, and then suddenly she gave way and broke into passionate sobs.

“Don’t cry, aunt,” I exclaimed; “it cannot be so bad as you think—we—I can surely do something to help uncle.”

“But it’s a mint of money,” she said; “you, what could you do, child?”

“I do not know,” I replied; “but I will do something if you only tell me all about the matter.”

It was very little she was able to tell. She had heard nothing except from strangers. And then she covered her face with her hands again and bewailed herself, whilst I wept for sympathy.

Just then Herr Droigel, who had arranged to call for me, entered the room.

“Bah !” he ejaculated, “this is bad. What has happened—what is the trouble?”

When we told him he said, “You must not despair, dear Madame ; there may be a tiny track found out of the forest. This good child and I will talk all over, and come back ; yes, we will come back.”

“You want to help the dear uncle, Annie,” he remarked, as we walked along the shore to The Retreat, in order to avoid meeting people. “I think I see a way if you object not.”

“Object ! I would cut off my hand to help Uncle Isaac.”

“Well then, I fancy I see a ray of light.”

“But you must not ask Mr. Florence to help,” I exclaimed, a sudden suspicion crossing my mind.

“No, no, no, no !” answered Herr Droigel, vehemently ; “that would be bad, so bad.

It shall be a little secret between you and me ; you must see the other uncle and learn all from him ; then we will set our wits to work, and when we leave this so enchanting Retreat act. Think of it, Annie, that through poor Droigel you may be able to render such help as shall enable that good man to weather his storm."

This was how it came to pass that after morning service, which we all duly attended at St. Stephen's, I found myself seated by the side of Jemima's husband driving inland to Deepley.

Jemima's husband evidently considered himself a sadly injured individual. Some one had suggested he ought to return his wife's fortune, or endeavour in other ways to assist his father-in-law.

"But of course, Miss Trenet," he said, "my friends would not hear of such imprudence for a moment ; a man must look to himself."

"Of course," I assented. Even had I

been inclined for argument, I well knew discussion in that case would have proved worse than useless.

When Mrs. Daniel learned my name and errand she received me with open arms. She at once made me free of that drawing room, the furniture in which had trembled in the balance. Ah ! how strange it seemed to me to think I had once been low-spirited because the glories of her abode were about to be revealed to my cousins—glories concealed from me.

“ Dear ! dear ! ” she said ; “ and so you are Annie ! I always thought you would turn out something wonderful ; when your Aunt Jane declared you would never be fit for anything but moping about, I stuck up for you. ‘ There’s a deal of outcome in those quiet girls,’ I said—those were my very words. And so you are staying at The Retreat, and went to church to-day with Sir Thomas and his lady, and sat in the family pew—only to think of it ! and but the other

day, so it seems, you were a bit of a child, and old Mrs. Motfield living, and all the family grudging you the food and shelter you got at the Cottage—all except me and my dear husband.”

“Your memory is shorter than mine, Mrs. Daniel,” I remarked. “I recollect the time when you did not entertain a very favourable opinion of me; but we will let bygones be bygones. I have no wish to recall the past, unless you force me to do so.”

That silenced her ecstasies, and during the remainder of my visit, which lasted only long enough to rest and feed the horse, I talked principally with my uncle—a man who had never liked me, and whom I had never liked, and who evidently did not believe that I should be able to assist him or his brother.

“Why did not Isaac tell her how he was placed if he thought she could be of any use?” he said, in answer to his wife’s

entreaties that he would explain everything.

I could have told him why, but I did not consider it part of my mission to state that Uncle Isaac's ideas were as widely removed from those of his brother as the east is far apart from the west.





CHAPTER XI.

MY OWN SECRET.

THIS is a letter I received from my Uncle Isaac some time after I left Fairport :—

“MY DEAR NANNIE,—I never thought the day would come when I should feel ashamed to write to you, but I do now. I have taken your future earnings, allowed you to mortgage your little property, perhaps run the risk of keeping you poor for life, and all this makes me feel very miserable ; but when I think how you have saved both me and my brother from ruin, how you have enabled us to keep our homes together and obtained time for us to work out the balance of our indebtedness, so that our

children may not be beggars and our homes destitute, I cannot but believe it will all be repaid to you in God's good time a hundred-fold.

“When the trouble is over, and the danger, through your help and that of our good friend Herr Droigel, averted, friends start up unexpectedly. A Mr. Florence called upon me the other day. He left Lady Muriel sitting in her carriage whilst he came in and asked if he could speak to me for a moment in private.

“He said he had heard indirectly of my embarrassments, and, as he took the liveliest interest in you and all connected with you, he hoped I would allow him to place his cheque-book at my disposal. He seemed vexed when I told him I required no further assistance—that, thanking him most gratefully, all the money I required had been provided.

“Spite of his kindness and generosity, I am afraid I do not like Mr. Florence, Annie.

It is said here you are going to marry him, and that it is a wonderful match for you to make.

“I think if there had been any truth in this report you would not have left me to hear it from strangers. He stayed talking to me for so long that I got fidgety, and ventured to remind him Lady Brooks was waiting.

“‘Let her wait,’ he said, impatiently. Fancy that—and she a lady, and he her guest. ‘She would come with me, though I did my best to escape ;’ and then he spoke about you, until at last I had to ask him to excuse me. There were customers wanting prescriptions made up, and no one but a boy to attend to them, so he went away promising to call again. I am glad to say he has not done this. Write to me soon, dear, and tell me whether I am to believe what is said or not. I cannot think you would marry merely for money or for rank. I reproach myself now that I saw so little of you while you were here.

“Reverting to my own affairs, I have had another offer of assistance—namely, from Mr. Risley, the principal solicitor in Fairport. It seems as if your help had brought me friends and good fortune, for business has never been better, my neighbours never more kind.”

“What says the dear uncle?” asked Herr Droigel.

“He fancies he has beggared me,” I answered. For various reasons I did not think it necessary to tell him anything about Mr. Florence’s visit or proffer of assistance. I failed to understand Herr Droigel’s real wishes regarding my future. I fail to understand what they were still, though I have a theory on the subject.

“Ah! you will soon bring all that to rights,” replied the Professor, gaily. “You shall appear with Serlini and carry the house.”

“Is that true? Will she permit—will she listen to the idea?” I cried, trembling with excitement.

“She is delighted,” replied Herr Droigel.
“She is graciousness itself.”

How I studied no one can imagine ; how I tried to perfect myself in this new branch of art surprised even the Professor.

Much of my new energy was displayed in order to rid myself of Mr. Florence, but he did not seem to resent it ; on the contrary, he only laughed when Miss Cleeves, who did not now visit us so much as formerly, spoke of my distressing industry.

“Miss Trenet will have more leisure to place at the disposal of her friends when the season is over,” he remarked on one occasion, when Mr. Sylvester chanced also to be of the company. “At present everything connected with operatic life has for her the charm of novelty.”

“Then you really intend to go upon the stage ?” said Mr. Sylvester to me in a low tone, whilst Miss Cleeves was cross-questioning Mr. Florence about a song he had introduced into Lord Fortfergus’ opera, and

Herr Droigel was reproducing the melody on the piano. "I did not believe the report—is it true?"

"Quite true," I replied.

He did not say he was glad—he did not say he was sorry; he turned the conversation to some indifferent subject, and shortly after took his leave.

"He thinks I must fail," I thought. "Well, he shall see."

Had I not been intoxicated with the fascination of the new life opening before me—had I been able to adhere to the resolution made far away from London, to prevent my senses being deluded by the deceptive glitter which at that time surrounded me, I must have shrunk from crossing the threshold I had reached.

But the glamour was upon me; I was back amongst the pleasant people of old. I had no leisure for thought or for fear. I was proud of what I had been able to do for my uncle, and of what those with whom

I was thrown in contact said I might do for myself. I never recollect during the whole of that period feeling alarmed concerning my ultimate destination but once. I had been singing at a concert of sacred music, and Madame Dellaro, who boasted the deepest and most disagreeable voice I ever heard in my life—people called it a contralto, I called it a baritone—was to see me safely back to the Droigel mansion. Perhaps for the sake of home peace the Professor did not accompany me everywhere himself as formerly, but consigned me now to the care of this friend, and now of that.

On the present occasion Madame Dellaro, wishing to leave before it was possible for me to do so, asked another friend to take charge of me. This friend—a grievous sinner, who had a knack of “singing religion,” to quote her own phrase, with the most holy and sanctified expression—with eyes upturned to heaven and a look of devotion in her face and attitude which a

saint might have envied—said to me as we drove along, in that foreign accent which seemed more familiar than English—

“Just you come into my house for one moment ; I want you most particular.”

I did not like going in, for hints and rumours of the life she led had reached even my ears ; but she laughed at all my excuses, and, as usual, I had not sufficient strength of mind to persist in taking a decided course. When we alighted she said something to the coachman which I could not hear, and then hurried me upstairs into a room brilliantly lighted, and filled with company.

“Caught so beautiful !” she exclaimed, turning to me and breaking out into a peal of laughter. “Now you stay for supper.” I did not say her nay or yea. Stay to supper I determined I would not, for amongst the persons assembled I saw the faces of several whose acquaintance Madame Serlini had cautioned me against forming

with the united strength of all the languages she spoke.

Herr Droigel, too, had not been silent concerning some of them. "Be civil, Annie," he said, "but nothing more. Say 'yes,' 'no,' 'good day,' 'good night.' Talk as little as you can help." And here I was in their midst.

"I have one crow to pluck with you," said the hostess, turning to a gentleman near her, none other than Mr. Sylvester. "I begged you to come so hard to my supper and you declined—'Non, non,' you were engaged elsewhere—and now, at the asking of Monsieur Neville, I find you here before me."

"Ah, mademoiselle!" he replied, "I wish I could plead that it is never too late to repent of an error, but the fact is I really cannot remain—I am going to Herr Droigel's."

"You can go to Droigel afterwards."

"A thousand thanks, but I must go to Droigel now."

“What is the special attraction there?” carelessly asked Mr. Florence, who was of the party.

“Business,” was the answer.

All this time I had been thinking how I was to escape. If I remained, Mr. Florence would, I felt satisfied, offer to escort me home, and the tête-à-tête I had been striving for so long a time to avoid must take place. Fortunately I had not yet removed my shawl, and only thrown back my hood, and noticing a door half concealed by curtains, I asked a lady near me if I could go into the next room to arrange my dress.

There was a second door in this room, opening on to the staircase, and without stopping to leave any message or apology, I ran down into the hall, passed through the porch, and found myself in the open air. Before I had reached the outer gate, however, Mr. Florence overtook me.

“My brougham is here,” he said, “if you will do me the honour of making use of it.”

“And I am here, Miss Trenet, if you will allow me the honour of seeing you home,” added Mr. Sylvester, coming hurriedly forward.

Involuntarily I passed Mr. Florence with a slight curtsey and cold “Thank you—I prefer walking,” and took Mr. Sylvester’s offered arm.

“May I inquire,” asked the former, after we had proceeded a short distance in silence, “by what right, Mr. Birwood, you claim to be this young lady’s escort?”

“I have no right,” was the quiet reply, “except that of having known Miss Trenet, less or more, nearly the whole of her lifetime.”

“She will take her death of cold,” remarked Mr. Florence; “and if she does, Herr Droigel will scarcely, I think, thank the friend of her childhood for having induced her to walk home in thin shoes and an evening dress. My brougham is close behind. Do you not imagine you would be

acting the part of a judicious guardian if you were to permit me to set you and your ward down at Herr Droigel's instead of aiding and abetting Miss Trenet in her endeavours to catch bronchitis?"

"You are very kind," answered Mr. Sylvester; and without consulting my wishes he paused to let the conveyance overtake us.

Mr. Florence opened the door for me, and then with a bow stood aside to permit Mr. Sylvester to follow, after which he got in himself.

It did not take us long to reach the Professor's door.

"Shall you be long here?" asked Mr. Florence, as Mr. Sylvester was bidding him good-night.

"Only a few minutes was the reply.

"Then, if you permit, I will wait. I should like to have a little conversation with you, and we can talk on our way to your chambers."

Whatever it might be Mr. Sylvester had to say to Herr Droigel he said in private, and it had the effect of rendering the Professor thoughtful for the remainder of the evening.

Next day Mr. Florence was closeted with him for full an hour, and after his departure Herr Droigel spoke to me concerning the offer that gentleman had done his Annie so great honour as to make.

“Do you not remember what you told me long and long ago?” I asked when he had quite finished his statement and his comments on the beauty of Mr. Florence’s affection and the generosity of his proposed settlements. “You said an artiste should never marry. You were right, and I mean to follow your advice.”

“But to all rules there are exceptions——” he was beginning, when I interrupted him.

“I shall prove no exception. I suppose I ought to be grateful to Mr. Florence, but

I am not. I suppose I ought to like him, but I cannot. I would rather die than marry him. I would sooner beg my bread than live in a palace with him."

"Softly, softly!" exclaimed the Professor, "you are not on the stage now. This is a very grave question. You have received an offer most remarkable, and you must not throw a jewel of price on one side as if it were of no value at all."

"I will not marry Mr. Florence."

"Well, well, well, this obstinate child must have her way. She shall not be opposed or irritated. She shall show her little airs and expend her fury on the boards, and then we will talk once more. She will learn wisdom as she grows older—learn that Droigel, with all the will in the world, cannot give her everything she would have—that the poor Professor, though he was able to teach her much, cannot stand for ever between her and the evil of this wicked world."

And solemnly shaking his head, Herr Droigel left me to my own reflections.

But for the engrossing thought of appearing with Madame Serlini, I scarcely know how I should have got through the weeks which followed—weeks during which I tried to banish the ever-recurring question of what plan for the future I must form—with whom I must live, where I ought to go.

That I could not remain at the Droigels', I felt confident; that if I could, it was neither fit nor expedient for me to do so, each day satisfied me more and more.

Droigel could not take charge of me as he had once done. Madame, even had she been willing, was unfit to take the care of any one. I was not old enough, wise enough, clever enough, to take care of myself.

What Herr Droigel had said was quite true. I had neither father, brother, mother, or sister; and without a husband, a woman

so lonely occasionally finds her position difficult.

The momentous evening arrived. It is a very different thing, singing in a concert-room and coming forward to the footlights and uplifting one's voice to stalls, boxes, and galleries: but this is a part of my experience on which I have no desire to enlarge. I never can recall that night without a terrible longing that the past could be undone—that the airs might be unsung, the acting prove a dream. I shrink when I think of having appeared before such a multitude in even so small a part as that allotted to me. In the moment of my greatest success, I see again a pair of wistful eyes fixed upon me with such a mournful, regretful expression, that my own filled with tears, and louder than the applause which followed, I can hear the throbbing of my heart, which at last understands its own mystery, comprehends the length and the breadth

of the gulf stretching between it and happiness.

What were congratulations, compliments, prophecies of future successes to me after that? What was it to me even that Madame Serlini herself said, speaking over my shoulder to Herr Droigel—

“She is a good girl; if she takes pains she may do great things yet.”

“You have not found it all pleasure, as you expected,” said Mr. Florence, softly. “I feared there might be a disappointment.”

“Not satisfied yet, little maiden?” asked Herr Droigel. “Why, what wouldst thou have—what canst thou want?”

“Take me home,” I whispered, both my hands clasped round his arm; “take me home—please, do.”

We drove back in silence, and when we re-entered the house, I would have gone to my own apartment at once, had not Herr Droigel, saying he wanted to speak

to me, entered the drawing-room and closed the door after him.

“Annie,” he began, “what ails thee, my child—what is the trouble?”

I sat silent for a minute, stupefied with the misery that had been so suddenly revealed to me. I knew what I wanted to say as well as I knew what I intended to do, but my lips refused to utter the words that rose to them.

“What is the trouble?” he repeated, in a tone which, though gentle, left me no choice but to answer.

“I shall never try to act again.”

“And wherefore not?”

“I dislike it.”

“You dislike it. Why?”

“I do not know—I cannot tell.”

“Think again, dear child; think once—twice—thrice——”

“I cannot tell,” I said, defiantly.

“Shall I tell?” he asked. “Sit down,” he continued, as I rose and tried to free

myself from the grasp of his great, soft, hand, which held me as if in a vice ; “ you are not a child, I am not quite blind—you are in love. Bah ! with a man who cares not for you—who will never care for you.”

“ Oh ! no, no,” I murmured.

“ Oh ! yes, yes ; poor little one, whom from my heart I pity. But this folly we must try to hide—the world would not pity, it would laugh, or cry fie, fie ! Say, Annie ; if it be hard to thee for me to probe thy secrets, how could it be borne for strangers to turn thy sacred fancies into ridicule ?”

“ I have no fancies,” I exclaimed. “ You are wrong, Herr Droigel, utterly and entirely. I have never thought, I have never known——”

“ There comes a moment of revelation,” he said, as I paused, confusion covering me ; “ it may be thou hast not hitherto thought—thou hast not heretofore known,

but the mask is off now ; thou hast looked into thine heart and seen. But there must be no more of looking and seeing," he went on, speaking determinedly ; "with me your secret is safe — buried — dead ; none other must know it—not one. We must have no more faltering, no more weakness, no more babble of abandoning a career which may be splendid——"

"I shall abandon it," I interrupted ; "I shall never sing again in opera—never."

"Ah ! my dear, you will think twice about that ; you will think more than twice before you give the world's big tongue liberty to wag about this thing so foolish ; you will cry all through the night, possibly ; you will spend your grief, and then you will to-morrow come to me, having seen the folly of taking a dead love to nurse, and say, 'Help me to hide this sorrow. Tell me how I shall dig a hole so deep, and press the earth over it so that no one may dream it has ever been.

Remind me that I owe much money, that I must earn gold to live. Tell me I am no great heiress who can afford to fling away bank notes for the sake of an illusion. Repeat it is shame to be won unsought—unmaidenly to give love when it has not been asked, where it is not desired.’ ”

“Do you think you have said enough,” Herr Droigel ?” I asked, rising and steady-ing myself for a moment ere I essayed to walk.

“I hope so,” he replied. “I never want to have to say anything about it again.”

He had said more than enough for me. Somehow I made my way upstairs into my room, turning the key inside.

After that there is a blank. The next thing I remember is lying on the floor with the moon shining into my chamber.





CHAPTER XII.

THE HEIR COMES TO HIS OWN.



WHAT Herr Droigel said was true : I had no such store of wealth I could afford to follow my inclinations ; whether the work were to my taste or not, I must do it. Whether I had learned to hate publicity or delight in living before a multitude, signified nothing. I had but one profession, and it was necessary for me to pursue it ; but one gift, and I had perforce to use it.

Though I did not weep through the night, though I did not spend my grief, morning, as the Professor had prophesied would be the case, brought sense with it, and I resumed my labours as if nothing

unusual had occurred to change the whole current of my ideas.

But the current was changed nevertheless. I worked harder than ever, but I only worked that my labour might sooner have an end. I tried my best to please the public, but it was only that I might be able all the earlier to bid the public an eternal farewell. Vain would it be to deny that applause still gave me pleasure, that silence filled me with dismay. To the last hour of my life the clapping of many hands, the huzzahs and encores of many voices, will stir my heart as the sound of a trumpet stirs the blood of a war-horse which has once listened to its call ; but the moment I was off the stage, the moment I retired from the platform, the old sick feeling returned, and I felt in my soul it was all vanity.

That I was deceiving Herr Droigel's intelligence, and deluding all others with whom I came in contact, I firmly believed ; never

thinking the Professor was reading me like an easy book, and that some who were interested in my future noted every change of humour, every caprice of temper, as carefully as my master himself.

I had no friend. Gretchen was occupied with her own affairs, and had it been otherwise I should scarcely have taken her into my confidence. Miss Cleeves came to see me but seldom, and when she did, made herself increasingly disagreeable. From the time I told Madame Serlini of Mr. Florence's offer, her manner froze towards me. I had no friend, so far as I knew, and perhaps it was as well, since a friend of whom I knew nothing was watching over my safety.

So days and weeks passed by, monotonously it seemed to me, for there is a wonderful monotony in work of any kind; and the time when I was anxious concerning my success—when I was doubtful whether I should be able to sing in opera

so as to please a critical audience—had faded into the mists of an apparently remote distance. Looking back, I cannot think the reputation I then achieved was built on a solid foundation. Years alone can prove whether the success of a singer is the result of adventitious circumstances or real merit, and my success must be attributed to many causes altogether foreign to either voice or merit.

I was young, and the public are lenient as well as partial to youth. I sang with Madame Serlini, who was in herself a tower of strength ; who, when she chose to help, could almost insure those associated with her performing well and singing their best.

The principal male singers took a kindly interest in me, whilst Mr. Florence exerted an influence which was not slight in obtaining generally favourable comments on my powers from the press.

Whatever talent I might have had, every chance therefore of recognition and

development. My career was short and sunny; my way lay across green fields, along shady lanes, over paths bordered by flowers, under arches crowned with roses. The frosts of winter, the decay of autumn, the rain, and the sleet, and the snow, were outside my experience; and it is only those who have outlived the keen winds of criticism, the adverse judgment of the select few, the indifference of the many—the difficulties which beset, the obstacles which retard all who are trying to win name and fame—that can tell of what metal they are really made. Had I continued in my profession I should have known more of my own capabilities or the want of them than I am ever likely to be acquainted with now. But an end was coming to that career on which I had so longed to enter. It came when nothing was further from my thoughts, and in this wise.

We were ready one night to leave HER MAJESTY'S, but Herr Droigel had not come to fetch me as agreed.

Madame Serlini, who could not brook being kept waiting for an instant, but who did not like leaving me alone, was fuming over his delay, when Mr. Florence, who had volunteered to find the Professor, returned.

“Herr Droigel is not here,” he said, addressing me, “but he has sent a fly, and the driver says his orders were to come for you first, and then to call for Miss Droigel on his way back.”

“He has made a mistake,” I replied; “he was to call for Gretchen and her father on his way here, but it does not matter. Good night, Madame; good night, Signor; good night.”

It was to be good-bye to that life, but I did not know that.

Mr. Florence and I walked up the Arcade together. The night was dark, the rain falling in torrents. Madame Serlini's brougham stopped the way. I knew her pair of bays, recognised her coachman, who

sat with the rain splashing from his coat, and the footman, who stood just within the Arcade, and who touched his hat to us as we passed.

My companion put up an umbrella, and drew my arm a little closer in his.

"I am afraid you will get wet," he remarked ; "your carriage is the last of all."

Almost running, we hurried along the soaking pavement. Mr. Florence turned the handle of the door ; I had my foot on the step to enter, when some one caught my disengaged hand, and, pulling me back, said, "That is not your carriage, Miss Trenet. Come with me."

"Interfere with this lady at your peril," exclaimed Mr. Florence.

"Interfere with her at yours," was the reply ; and before I could recover from my astonishment, Mr. Florence was lying prone on the pavement, and a crowd beginning to collect.

"In Heaven's name, what is the matter ?

what has happened ?” asked Madame Serlini, turning to my companion for an explanation.

“Take her home with you,” he answered.
“I will be with you early to-morrow.”

“With me ?” repeated Madame, in amazement ; “did you say home *with me* ?”

“Yes ; she will be safe with you,” was the reply. “I must see Droigel at once. Good night.”

“It is like a bad dream,” exclaimed Madame, and taking my hand in hers, she held it fast all the way to her own house.

“Annie,” she said to me next morning, “when Mr. Birwood wrote to you it is a pity you did not at least answer his letter.”

“He never wrote to me. I never had a letter from him in my life,” I replied.

Mr. Sylvester was standing beside Madame Serlini, and I turned to him to confirm my statement, but he gravely shook his head.

“I wrote to you,” he began—“wrote a

letter which I feared you thought dictatorial and impertinent, because you did not know—how could you?—what your going on the stage meant to me.”

By this time Madame Serlini had left the room.

“I never received such a letter,” I said; “what was it about?”

He told me it was to implore me not to appear in public again, but to marry him if I was not afraid of comparative poverty.

“If you received that letter now, what answer would you give me?” he enquired.

I know what I ought to have done. I know I ought to have refused him decisively, but I only said—

“Oh, Mr. Sylvester, how you ask me to ruin your prospects—to spoil your life.”

I will not repeat his answer. It is enough for me to tell it was no longer any shame for me to love him—that I had found friend, hero, brother, husband, all in one.

Would there were space to tell what Droigel said to me and I to Droigel when, later in the same day, he called to see his "impulsive Annie."

That our interview was not pleasant may be gathered from the fact that when he was leaving I refused to shake hands with him.

"I forgot the years," he said, plaintively. "I was a woman all over. When he told me it was best for me to have few friends and doubt every one, I pouted; when he let me have my own way and make friends and believe in all, I blamed him because harm nearly came of it. Well, he could wait. After all, I was only following my nature, only displaying another trait common to my adorable sex." And after administering this consolation to himself, he departed.

We were not married in London, but at Little Alford. Dr. Packman gave me away; Miss Packman was my bridesmaid; and we spent a quiet honeymoon, as befitted those

who were not, for some time at least, likely to be overburdened with this world's goods.

I had not a sixpence. The house at Little Alford was mortgaged, my small fortune spent, my earnings in Herr Droigel's pocket. The agreement I signed at the time of Uncle Isaac's embarrassment bound me to the Professor for years. How difficult it proved to obtain my release from it I did not know until long afterwards ; but I was released, and as I never have sung, so I never shall sing in public again.

In entering upon my new life only two things troubled me—one, that his marriage had placed an insuperable barrier between my husband and the Wifforde estates ; another, that Miss Cleeves resented her cousin's choice even more bitterly than did her aunts.

“ You have ruined his prospects and cursed my life ” was the pleasant sentence in which she summed up the extent of my delinquencies. “ It was an evil morning

that on which I ever saw you. If I had known what I was doing, I would rather have bitten my tongue out than taken any notice of you—given you ideas above your rank, induced you ever to think a man like Sylvester would condescend to look at a girl in your station.”

“But, Miss Cleeves,” I remonstrated, “what can it matter to you?”

“What can it matter to me?” she repeated. “I loved him as you could never love anybody; ay, and I should have *made* him love me back again had it not been for your demure face and simple ways. There; don’t cling and cry to me, you baby; you have broken my heart;” and having so spoken, she left me.

“Was it really true she ever cared for you?” I asked my husband. “I always thought; that is, she always implied——”

“I know,” he answered, “it pleased her that the world should think I was a rejected suitor, and yet it is as true that I

once gave up all hope of being heir to the Miss Wiffordes because I would not marry her, as it is that I have now given up all desire of being their heir because I would marry you."

"And you do not repent?"

"I shall never repent," he said, earnestly.

There came, however, a day when the olive branch was sent to him—when "our ladies," saying they should like to see him once more, requested his presence at the Great House; but he declined to go without his wife. Had I known I should have begged him not to let me prove a bone of contention—but I did not know till another letter arrived asking us both to visit Lovedale.

I did not enjoy staying with my husband's relations. It seemed to me, courteous as they were, that their whole time was occupied in watching my actions, noting my words, criticising my manners; and, besides, there was one ever-present thought oppressing my soul—namely, that through

me Sylvester had lost all chance of succeeding to those broad lands, to all the wealth and consideration that but for me might one day have been his. Nor were my spirits rendered any better by the news which reached the Great House not long after our arrival, that Miss Cleeves had made a most wretched marriage. For forty-eight hours Miss Wifforde kept her room, resolutely refusing to be comforted; and when she reappeared she looked years older and was fain to avail herself of my husband's arm as she walked with him along the terrace and up the walks that wound in and out amongst the dark pine trees.

Our visit had by this time extended far beyond the period originally fixed for our return, and though it proved very dull, miserable, and uncomfortable to me, I had not as yet ventured to hint that I was wearying to be back in our own modest house, which seemed to me so much more

home-like than the Wiffordes' great rambling mansion.

At length, however, I broke silence.

"I hope you will not think me selfish for asking such a question"—that was the way in which I introduced the subject—"but when are we to leave here—when shall we go home again?"

"Do you want to get home again?" he inquired.

"Very, very much," was my reply.

"Then we will ask Miss Wifforde," he said, smiling. "Aunt Laura," he began, leading me to the room where, arrayed in stiff silks, "our ladies" sat doing Berlin woolwork, "my wife wants to know when we are to go home?"

"My dear," said Miss Wifforde, in reply, and the hand which held her needle shook a little, though her voice never trembled, "we hope you will stay here always—it is fit the heir should reside on the property which will one day be his."

“Do you mean—oh! what do you mean?” I asked, looking from one to the other.

“We mean,” answered Miss Dorothea, kindly, “that we are about to place a great trust in you : the maintenance of the honour, the keeping of the dignity of an old name.”

For a minute I could not speak. Then I replied, “I will try to prove myself worthy of that trust.”

“We are not afraid of the result,” said Miss Wifforde, and rising from her chair she kissed me solemnly ; after which Miss Dorothea did the same.

It was like a religious ceremony—I am sure it produced the effect of one upon my mind.





CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

This is a summer's evening: sunshine is flooding the landscape, bathing woods and plantations, lawns, fields, flowers, in a glory of golden light. From the window near which I am seated, the Love, murmuring among its stones, a calm peaceful rivulet on its way to the great sea, is distinctly visible. Shading my eyes I can discern the stone on which Miss Cleaves and I held our first colloquy, when our lives had still to be lived, when the future seemed all mysterious, when the past was as yet but one day taken out of the spring-time; and summer, autumn, winter were all to come.

Ah! how long ago since I and the brown

thrush tried conclusions, since I conquered him ignominiously, and sang my song till his was silenced.

How many thrushes have sang on that bough since then ! How many other Annies have during the interval made their curtsies to a British public ! Questions like these make one feel old. The fresh actors are coming on ; ever and ever we hear the faint echoes of departing footsteps—the sounds growing louder and louder of those which are approaching.

Aspirants for the laurel wreath are constantly pressing forward ; those who have won, those who have lost on earlier fields, they have passed, they are passing away.

They come, they go. Between me and the setting sun I behold the dim figures of a shadowy throng : men and women I have known ; men and women I may never know ; men and women who existed before I ever came into being—they are there—a

mighty company—who have fretted or are fretting or will fret their way somehow across the marvellous stage of life.

It is enough—I turn away my eyes and take up my pen once more. Some day another tale will be written about me, but not in three volumes. A legend will be carved about me, for copies of which the most inveterate novel readers will not clamour, and refuse to be appeased.

Amongst other things *that* is coming. I am reminded of the fact by looking at an aged woman, who sits where she can sometimes lay her left hand on mine; though she has lived far, far beyond the period allotted to man, she still retains her faculties. She is feeble, she is paralysed, but she lives—she enjoys : she enjoys the sunshine in the summer, the blazing wood fire in the winter. In all respects she is changed. She likes me to sing to her what she calls “good songs,” and she loves still more to hear scraps of manuscript read over. She

likes the sound of the children's laughter, and she and Hunter, who bears her company when I cannot do so, are content that I am Sylvester's wife, that our children should be Wiffordes of Lovedale.

"If I go first," Miss Dorothea says, speaking as well as her infirmity will permit, "you promise, Annie, that Hunter shall stay here till she dies too?"

"Yes, aunt, I promise—for Sylvester and myself, and our sons and our daughters."

There is no lack of an heir now at the Great House, and a different place it is, I ween, to the gaunt, solemn, almost uninhabited mansion upon which my childish gaze used to fasten itself in curiosity and in awe.

Miss Wifforde lived to see some of these changes—lived to see a girl born, whom we named after her. She was christened Laura Cleaves Wifforde, and Miss Wifforde's last words to me were—

"If *she*," well I knew whom she meant

by "she," "ever comes back, you will be true to her, dear."

"True for ever," I answered. Would she would give me the chance? I hope, I pray, I believe, that woman who fancied I wronged her may yet give me an opportunity of showing how deep and lasting is my love. There must come an hour when her heart will turn back with tenderness and yearning to those who are so faithfully her friends, and I never see a stranger coming up the avenue without a feeling of expectancy. I never in the twilight look towards the long French windows opening on the terrace without a fancy stirring within me that the wanderer will yet stand at one of them and beckon me to her with the imperious movement familiar of old.

The Cottage has no tenant. It was a fancy of mine to keep it vacant and put in as caretaker an old servant who lived with us there when I was a tiny child. So far as was possible the rooms are furnished and

ornamented as they were in the days when the Great House viewed from below appeared an awful and inscrutable mystery—a continent between which and me stretched the waters of an unknown ocean.

Now from the windows of the Great House I look down on the humble abode from which I have risen to such mighty honour, and no amusement I can offer to the children ever affords them such keen enjoyment as the proposal to have a picnic at the Cottage. They delight in the small rooms, the old-fashioned furniture, the lavender, the gilly flowers, the beds of thyme, the humming bees, just as I delighted in the same things before they were thought of.

They never weary of hearing how “mamma lived here when she was a little girl,” and how papa, when he was young, used to ride past on a great black horse, and how mamma from one particular window watched him. The water from the well has a special sweetness to their fancy—it is

colder than the water at the Great House, and clearer also, they conceive; and an acme of happiness is attained when after having filled the kettle for themselves they bring it into the kitchen and watch it hung to boil over a crackling wood fire.

My life has, in comparison to the lives of others, been almost uneventful. Now that the poor story is told it seems to me, thinking of the few real incidents recorded, scarcely worth the telling; but I have been very, very happy—I am happier than words can express; and that in a world where happiness seems the exception, sorrow the rule, is something to chronicle.

One of our children is called Annie. She has but this moment returned from the Cottage, and her little hands are full of flowers gathered in its old-fashioned garden.

Close to my side she comes, the little face eager with the energy of a new purpose; the dark eyes darker with the excitement of a new idea of a fully developed plan.

“When I am married——” she begins. Mark! there is no doubt in her mind about the matter. It is not, “If I ever marry,” “If I ever am asked to marry,” but straightforwardly, without doubt or a shadow of turning. “*When* I am married, I shall live at the Cottage; that shall be *my* home.”

I take her in my arms. The flowers fall from her hands, and cover me with leaf and blossom.

The scents of the old days are around me. I hear the birds singing, and the bees humming, and the melody of an old, old song is in my ears and the Great House and the Cottage are both the same to me at last. To my thinking there is no tenderer conjunction of words possible than that contained in the sentence “HOME, SWEET HOME.”

THE END.

